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# Representations of Class, Gender, Race, and Religion in the Novels of Somerville and Ross, 1894-1925.

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**REPRESENTATIONS OF CLASS, GENDER, RACE, AND RELIGION  
IN THE NOVELS OF SOMERVILLE AND ROSS, 1894-1925**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother Germaine Pauline Virginie  
Pepinster and my grandmother Henriette Barbe Michotte.

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My first thanks to my dissertation director Professor Patrick McGee, who from the beginning supported my interest in Somerville and Ross. Professor McGee's meticulous readings have fostered my progress as a researcher and writer, allowing me to develop my interpretations independently while always encouraging self-criticism. I value highly the time he spent on my work. I am also grateful to the members of my committee, Professor Carl Freedman, Michelle Masse, and Malcolm Richardson for their insights and to the Dean's representative, Professor Nixon.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the Anglo-Irish writers, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross (née Violet Martin), attempt to define themselves and others in terms of class, gender, race, and religion at a time when self-definition itself is an act of resistance and defiance. This analysis focuses on four novels: The Real Charlotte (1894), co-authored by Somerville and Ross, Mount Music (1919), An Enthusiast (1921), and The Big House of Inver (1925), written by Somerville alone. Since these novels were composed during the most chaotic years of Irish history when the country was in transition from the status of a colonial dependency of the British Empire to that of an independent bourgeois state, this study examines these novels in the context of those far-reaching historical events. This dissertation demonstrates the changes and developments in class, gender, and race as they are constructed in the context of a changing national identity. While admitting Somerville and Ross's "class consciousness" (indeed, their novels are a brilliant and accurate account of the class structure in small town, rural Ireland) and their construction of the peasant and middle classes as other, this study argues that such a construction does not always equate difference with inferiority, nor does it assume that these representations are

uniform or static in these four novels. In fact, the writers' representation of these constructs and the manner in which they intersect with each other will vary from one character to another and from one novel to another, according to the historical situation. Furthermore, these changes in social identities, social relationships, and balance of power, which frequently depend upon a relationship to the land, may not be explained by the change from collaborative to single authorship alone but rather to the volatile political conditions of the time. Finally, this study proposes that these novels can also be read as acts of resistance to the rapidly changing dominant ideologies of the time.

## INTRODUCTION

Edith E. Somerville (1858-1949) and Martin Ross<sup>1</sup> (1862-1915) were two Anglo-Irish<sup>2</sup> women of Protestant, landed-gentry families who wrote ten novels and numerous short stories, travel books, and magazine articles between 1884 and 1948. They wrote all their major works collaboratively. After Martin Ross's death in 1915, Somerville continued to publish under their joint authorship, so that novels written by Somerville alone after 1915 are still always referred to as the writings of Somerville and Ross. Although they were prolific writers, Somerville and Ross's reputation rests almost entirely on five texts: The Real Charlotte (1894), a novel that has consistently been regarded as their best work and that has been described as their masterpiece and the finest nineteenth-century Irish novel;<sup>3</sup> three books of short stories: Some Experiences of an Irish R. M. (1898), Further Experiences of an Irish R. M. (1908), and In Mr. Knox's Country (1915), famous for their humor and comedy of manners, often edited collectively and discussed as one text;<sup>4</sup> and, finally, The Big House of Inver (1925), written by Somerville alone after the death of Martin Ross, the last work to receive any critical attention, most frequently in discussions of the Irish fictional genre known as "The Big House" novel.

Somerville and Ross have long been evaluated and situated in the canon as two writers who uphold the Anglo-Irish world-view of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Ireland and who describe the passing of their decaying world with sadness and regret, albeit with a detached humor and irony. As I will show, critics have frequently argued that, although Somerville and Ross brilliantly portray the range of classes and people populating provincial Ireland and its small towns, they are limited as writers because they display a sympathetic bias towards their own class, whatever its shortcomings. Furthermore, they depict the middle classes with disdain if not outright disgust, while the lower classes, usually the native Irish,<sup>2</sup> are treated as "stage Irish," figures of humor and derision.

With a few recent exceptions, this reading has persisted because humor dominates the best-known texts, the Irish R. M. stories, while dialect is used widely in The Real Charlotte and The Big House of Inver to represent the lower class, native Irish characters. Thus, because many of their portrayals of the native Irish employ humor and dialect, these might be read as presenting stereotypes of class and race. Such a reading might be justified if these texts represented the complete canon of Somerville and Ross. This is not the case, however.

Two novels, Mount Music (1919) and An Enthusiast (1921), written by Somerville during an especially turbulent but fluid period of Irish history, have been largely ignored by scholars. These novels present an analysis of Irish class structure and religious, political, and racial divisions that is far more inclusive than the analysis presented in their better-known writing and that takes into account viewpoints other than those usually associated with Somerville and Ross. Mount Music and An Enthusiast contain surprisingly few stereotypes but demonstrate Somerville's acute ability to analyze a wide range of rural Irish society with some objectivity and with variable degrees of class, racial, or religious bias. A reading of these two novels complicates the representation of race and class in Somerville and Ross and thus requires a re-reading and a re-evaluation of their other texts.

Because the novels of Somerville and Ross with their construction of gender, race, and class are deeply implicated in the construction of Irish history and Irish identity, their works are sometimes misread because of the critics' ignorance of the complexities of Irish history. A reading of Somerville and Ross, like a reading of Irish history, depends upon the readers' perspective. Somerville and Ross's audience has been Anglo-Irish, Irish, and English (today it is still more varied), all of whom approach the narrative of

Irish history as it exists in Somerville and Ross from different viewpoints." Furthermore, Somerville and Ross were writing at a time when both Irish identities and the canon of Irish literature were in the process of being constructed in a revolutionary and post-colonial situation.

In this context, it is valid to state that Somerville and Ross are writing in what Mary Louise Pratt identifies as the "contact zones . . . social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths" (182-83). Pratt argues that texts which are produced under these conditions "are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker's own community. Their reception is highly indeterminate" (183-84). This situation applies directly to Somerville and Ross whose audience was both native and foreign, colonial and indigenous, and whose "own community" even was highly uncertain, since the writers themselves were in the process of recreating their identities. Some of the critics, therefore, fail to analyze the authors' representation of class as it intersects in the Irish context with constructs of nationality, race, and religion. For example, critics equate class consciousness with race consciousness, they confuse class with religion, and they fail to differentiate between class and nationality. Although class, religion, and

race were clearly intertwined from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century as a result of British policy in Ireland so that the Irish and the English were regarded in strictly dichotomous terms, and although traces of this view might remain amongst the ruling class in the late nineteenth century, it does not necessarily follow that Somerville and Ross adopted this view uncritically. I propose that although Somerville and Ross did not, of course, perceive race as a social construct, neither did they perceive race in Ireland as a simple dichotomy. Furthermore, although race, religion, and class cannot be discussed in isolation from each other, they are, nevertheless, not the same. Nor do the authors' attitudes to these constructs remain constant over the thirty-year period to be discussed in this dissertation.

In his recent book, Remembrance and Imagination, Joep Leerssen has touched upon the problematic interpretation of the "pleasant peasants" in Irish literature, and he discusses whether or not they are Stage Irish, noting that the term "has generally been used in a loose, vaguely rhetorical sense in order to take certain authors, like Somerville and Ross, to task for supercilious stereotyping" (171). Leerssen argues that such characters and their register are endemic in Irish writing and can be found in "a nationalist playwright

like Dion Boucicault" as well as in "the Abbey theatre's kitchen comedies." He continues:

It seems spurious to exonerate some of those authors from the charge of Stage Irishness while damning others by it, since the distinction usually involves a vague sense as to whether or not one chooses to find a given author offensive or insufficiently sympathetic in his/her treatment of the Irish character. . . . Lover and Allingham are not the egregious perpetrators of sentimental Stage Irishism because they did so from a conservative, unionist perspective, as opposed to Kickham or Boucicault; the point seems rather that with a nationalistically sympathetic audience, the stereotyped characters of nationalist authors like Kickham and Boucicault seem to have caused less offense. (My emphasis 172-73)

In the final analysis, argues Leerssen, interpretation is a matter of the audience's choice.

Failing to recognize Somerville and Ross's relationship with both England and Ireland, some of the critics make the unwarranted assumption that Somerville and Ross project the same stereotypes that the English projected in the nineteenth century, during the struggle for Home Rule. These include, for example, the stereotype that portrays all the native Irish as Celtic, Catholic, and lower-class, and, therefore, by definition, not only the very opposite of the English upper classes, but also their inferior. Furthermore, these critics fail to identify the particular situation of the Anglo-Irish and confuse their world view with that of the English. The assumption seems to be that Somerville and Ross have accepted the stereotypes of the English ruling class



and, therefore, their representations of class and race will remain fixed and unaffected by changes in the economic, social, and political climate.<sup>3</sup> Finally, such superficial analyses ignore Somerville and Ross's situation as women and suffragists, a situation that will enable them at times to cross boundaries of class and race.

In this dissertation, I will examine how Somerville and Ross attempt to define themselves in terms of gender, class, race, and nationality at a time when self-definition itself is an act of resistance and defiance. This analysis will focus primarily on four novels: The Real Charlotte (1894), Mount Music (1919), An Enthusiast (1921), and The Big House of Inver (1925). Since these novels were written during some of the most chaotic years of Irish history when the country was in transition from the status of a colonial dependency of the British Empire to that of an independent bourgeois state, these novels will be read in the context of those far-reaching historical events. In addition, this study will briefly refer to the biographies of these writers, whose class position and whose politics (at least Somerville's) were profoundly altered as a result of these changes. I will demonstrate that the novels portray changes and developments in class and gender as they are constructed in the context of race and religion, and sometimes nationality. Taking into account that Somerville and Ross are undoubtedly

"class-conscious" (indeed, their novels are a brilliant and accurate analysis of the class structure in rural Ireland) and that they unquestionably construct the peasant and middle classes as other, I will argue that such a construction does not always equate difference with inferiority, nor does it assume that these representations are uniform or static. In fact, the writers' representation of these constructs and the manner in which they intersect with each other will vary from one character to another and from one novel to another, according to the historical situation. Furthermore, I will show that these changes in social identities, social relationships, and balance of power, which frequently depend upon a relationship to the land, may not be explained by the change from collaborative to single authorship alone but rather to the volatile political conditions of the time. Finally, I will propose that these novels can be read as acts of resistance to the dominant ideologies of the time.

#### **Somerville and Ross Criticism**

In nearly one hundred years of criticism scholars have inflected Somerville and Ross's writing with their different readings of the Anglo-Irish and the Anglo-Irish situation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish history. Somerville and Ross have, consequently, usually been read only as members of the privileged land-owning class who resisted

change and who had for centuries profited from the labor of the peasants. This class is depicted as luxuriously idling in the "Big Houses" while the tenants, who work the stony soil, live in wretched poverty on the verge of starvation, and are constantly threatened with eviction and emigration. Although such representations of the Anglo- and native Irish may indeed reflect images derived from nineteenth-century fiction and early twentieth-century Irish historiography and are reasonably accurate, they tend to represent those two groups--the native Irish peasants and the Anglo-Irish landlords--in monolithic terms. As we shall see, this is also a misreading of the lives of Somerville and Ross, who were not reactionaries but rather progressive women who earned their livelihood as professional writers, and who, despite their origins as daughters of the landed gentry, supported the reformatory cooperative movement, entered into the middle-class world of entrepreneurship, and were, throughout their lives, actively involved in the suffragist movement.

The writings of Somerville and Ross have been reviewed in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals since they published their first novel, An Irish Cousin, in 1889. In the following review of the literature on Somerville and Ross, I have focused, whenever possible, on general comments on their work since I will refer to specific analyses of the

novels in the relevant chapters of this study. A review of An Irish Cousin and later fiction, published by C. L. Graves in the Quarterly Review (1913), still remains one of the most accurate in its perceptive, if somewhat limited, analysis of their work. Graves describes their partnership as

the most brilliantly successful example of creative collaboration in our times . . . The writers prove themselves the possessors of a strange faculty of detachment which enabled them to view the humors of Irish life through the unfamiliar eye of a stranger without losing their own sympathy. They were at once of the life they described and outside it. They showed a laudable freedom from political partisanship; a minute familiarity with the manners and customs of all strata of Irish society; an unerring instinct for the "sovrän word," a perfect mastery of the Anglo-Irish dialect; and an acute yet well-controlled sense of the ludicrous . . . (Qtd. in Lane and Lane 605)

In this brief review, Graves highlights many features of Somerville and Ross's writing that later critics will discuss but often with little more detail and development: their collaboration, their detachment, their insight, their familiarity and detailed knowledge of rural Ireland, their style, their accurate use of dialect, and their sense of the absurd. What is particularly striking in Grave's review is his perception of the collaborators' position in turn-of-the-century Ireland--their paradoxical situation of being "at once of the life they described and outside it," and "their freedom from political partisanship." Although early critics note their air of detachment and later critics prefer to

emphasize their ironic stance, few critics believe them to be free of "partisanship."

References to the authors' class position and attempts to situate them within the context of Irish history were first raised by Stephen Gwynn in 1925 and 1936. V. S. Pritchett, in a 1947 review of The Real Charlotte, ascribes to the Anglo-Irish characters "a snobbery that is in the blood" and asserts that Francie's death "is due to the profound snobbery of the authors" (608), confusing the fictionalized characters' points of view with those of the authors. In Writers and Politics (1955), Conor Cruise O'Brien resurrects their identification as "snobs" although he does admit to the writers' having a "live and intelligent system of social apprehension" (107). Terence de Vere White (1972) believes that "Edith Somerville flattered her own class" (22), yet he concedes significantly that "[a]t first Anglo-Irish writing was resented in the new Ireland" (23). Richard Fallis (1977), amongst others, believes Somerville and Ross to be typically Anglo-Irish; they write from "their own positions safe at the top of Irish society" (135) and in "[t]he old Anglo-Irish tradition of tales based on colonialist exploitation of local color and character" (134). As recently as 1995, Otto Rauchbauer, in his magnificent catalogue of the Edith Somerville Archive in Drishane,

frequently refers to Edith's habit of viewing Catholics "du haut en bas."

The critics are generally undecided as to Somerville and Ross's attitude towards their own class. In the 1980s, both Wayne Hall and John Cronin describe Somerville and Ross as writing primarily about "the decline of the landed gentry" (Hall 64) and "the decline of their own tribe" (Cronin, Anglo-Irish 139). The focus here still centers on the writers' preoccupation with their own class, but, in the 1980s and 1990s, critics such as Hall, J. W. Foster, and Richard Tillinghast seem to be interpreting the Anglo-Irish viewpoint as one of nostalgia or like Seamus Deane (Short History) as one of "lament" for a past era rather than one of "superiority." But in the 1980s, however, reviewers such as Hall are beginning to notice also a detached irony in the women's writing. Many critics agree with Cronin that while Somerville and Ross are capable of indicting their "beloved tribe," "the writers' preoccupation [is] with the displacement of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy landlords by the native Irish" (150). Most critics' assessment of them for last forty years could be summarized in Hall's words that "their sympathies and point of view remain bound to those of the Big House" (64).

Referring to their knowledge of and their realistic representation of life in nineteenth-century Ireland, Orel

Williams is the first to link their names with that of the French realist, Honore de Balzac. In 1926, Williams includes The Real Charlotte amongst Some Great English Novels and defines Charlotte as "a kind of Irish Cousine Bette" (273), a comparison which is also taken up by Gwynn (Irish Literature).<sup>3</sup> Since Williams and Gwynn, Cronin (Somerville and Ross) was the first to raise the question of their social realism, insisting, nevertheless, that they write as outsiders. While earlier critics, such as Williams, pointed out that their novels were concerned with a "small field," Hall writes of their "epic scope," a perception which has been reiterated by Lorna Reynolds and quite recently by Terry Eagleton, Julian Moynahan, and Declan Kiberd.

The novels of Somerville and Ross do indeed portray most segments of Irish rural society, including the peasantry, as Guy Fehlmann has observed in his study, Somerville and Ross, Temoins de l'Irlande d'Hier (1970)<sup>4</sup>, but, once again, critics seem to be sharply divided as to their representation of this class. Gwynn is the first to note that they are "infinitely closer in sympathy to the people . . . than ever Lever or Maria Edgeworth" (Irish Literature 171), two Anglo-Irish writers with whom they are often compared, and O'Brien, defending their Irishness against attacks by Daniel Corkery who was writing thirty years earlier, also points out that their "imaginative sympathy deepened" (113) in the later

novels. Cronin, too, praises their "sympathetic insight" (Somerville and Ross 101), and Susan and Thomas Cahill note that "the cousins dealt even handedly with gentry and peasantry" (58). Furthermore, Hilary Robinson (1980), in her critical appreciation of Somerville and Ross, states:

Their advantage over many of the writers of the Irish Literary Revival was that they did not live in Dublin but in daily contact with the people of the West of Ireland. . . . They knew the country people with an intimacy quite different from the observation--however sympathetic--of an outsider. (49)

Fehlmann, too, has commented on their unwillingness to judge, "elles s'enforcent de ne pas porter de jugement et laissent le lecteur libre de se forger une opinion" (138).

Pritchett (1947), on the other hand, was the first to charge them with "purveying the stage Irishman to English magazines," and, generally, later scholars have been more critical; Hall also describes their characters as "stage Irish." Alan Warner writes of "a lack of sympathy with the peasantry," and while Moynahan admits that "they knew all there was to know about the country people," the writers portray them as being "of a different, inferior species" (170). Rauchbauer states that their "attitude towards the Catholic Irish is a highly ambivalent affair. It oscillates between complete identification with them and statements of utter contempt" (227).



Maureen Waters provides another approach in her book, The Comic Irishman, when she writes of "a class consciousness and a racist consciousness at work in Somerville and Ross" (20), yet she observes that their "dialogue . . . is better and more accurate than that of most comic writers who preceded them" (21). On the other hand, Kiberd (1996) has most recently commented on Somerville and Ross that "[s]o far were they from stage Irishry that they noted with dismay the willingness of Irish country people to play Paddy or Biddy for the amusement of their social superiors" (69).

Somerville and Ross's use of Anglo-Irish dialect in the dialogue is one area of their writing that, from the earliest reviews, has earned unqualified praise. De Vere White (1972) writes that Edith Somerville "had the courage to attack the traditional patois in which Carleton's peasant stories are told--a manner which when outsiders use it is condemned as stage Irish" (22). James Cahalan, in The Irish Novel (1988), calls them "writers of masterfully accurate and effective rural Irish dialogue" and echoes Waters in pointing out that in their use of authentic vernacular they "were predecessors of Lady Gregory and Synge" (91). Following Anthony Cronin, Cahalan quotes Patrick Kavanagh as saying "that Somerville and Ross had a better ear for Irish dialogue than anybody except James Joyce" (91). Both Robinson in her critical appreciation and Gifford Lewis in The World of the Irish R.M.

have chapters in their books in which they describe Somerville's and Ross's efforts to collect and record local dialects, but no one has as yet made an analysis of their use of Anglo-Irish dialect.

There are a number of topics upon which the critics have made little comment. Although English characters pervade the novels and the short stories, little analysis of them exists. Fallis once again identifies the Anglo-Irish with the English. He states, for example, that "their satiric sketches of tenants and workmen are no more acidic than the sketches of their own class, the English, who came to administer and straighten out muddled Ireland" (135). Cronin, on the other hand, differentiates the Anglo-Irish from the English and observes that these "writers always reserve a special scorn for the type of visitor from the large island" (Somerville and Ross 15). Kiberd, one of the few scholars, aside from Fehlmann, to contextualize their situation, notes that "[l]ike most of their class, they had little love for England, feeling quite betrayed by its leaders" (69).

Similarly, little has been written on the matter of Somerville and Ross's audience. Gwynn in 1936 observed that their reading public was "largely English" although he adds that "never at any time were they as much valued in England as in Ireland" (171). The subject of readership does not appear again until the 1980s. Hall points out that "the

approval from British audiences gave the two authors their first established degree of financial security" (71), a fact that has been overlooked by most critics except Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon who note that "Castletownsend had to be paid for" (185). Deane and J. W. Foster seem to think that Somerville and Ross were influenced by the pressure of English audiences, who presumably demanded a particular representation of Irish life, while Cahalan seems to think that one of their main purposes for writing was to entertain their audiences.

Another area of the authors' work that has been largely ignored is the construction and representation of gender in the novels. Gender is first alluded to in 1966 by Thomas Flanagan in his reading of The Real Charlotte, but it is not considered again until 1983 in an article by Reynolds in Women in Irish Legend, Life and Literature. Cahalan, in 1988, also notes that "views of gender . . . are central to all of the novels of Somerville and Ross, yet have never received sufficient critical attention, the focus having been a sociopolitical one" (92). The only full-length study of gender is Ann Owens Weekes' 1990 analysis of The Real Charlotte.

With the exception of Flanagan, Fehlmann, Hall, J. W. Foster, and Moynahan, relatively few critics have attempted to discuss the novels of Somerville and Ross in their

historical context, while only two writers, Flanagan (1966) and later Fehlmann (1970), have raised the central issue of nineteenth-century Ireland: "the inveterate Irish greed for land" (Lyons, Ireland 62), an issue echoed by McHugh and Harmon who note in the women's writing "an artistic use of the tensions underlying the whole question of land in Ireland" (184). Furthermore, although virtually all the criticism from the 1930s onwards has linked Somerville and Ross's writing to the representation of class and, by implication in the Irish context, to race and religion also, no critics have attempted to historicize and contextualize these representations within the discussion of national and cultural identity that was raging in Ireland during the very years that Somerville and Ross were producing their major work. Scholars also fail to take into account the change from dual to single authorship after 1915. Furthermore, they fail to consider the changes and contradictions in Somerville's own political positions during her life-time and during the most critical phase of Irish history from 1880 to the mid-1920s.

Finally, a serious problem in the criticism of Somerville and Ross is the omission of important novels from the study of their canon. Most scholars have ignored the majority of the cousins' writing and focus exclusively on The Real Charlotte and The Irish R. M., with passing reference to

The Big House of Inver and occasional references to early novels, including An Irish Cousin. Flanagan mentions both Mount Music and An Enthusiast and Cahalan also discusses Mount Music and An Enthusiast along with The Big House of Inver as "interesting novels." While Mount Music is often included in bibliographies, An Enthusiast is missing from the bibliographies of Cronin, Hall, McHugh and Harmon, and C. L. Innes. In recent studies both Mount Music and An Enthusiast are missing from Moynahan's study of Anglo-Irish Literature as well as from Kiberd's Inventing Ireland. Thus critics make generalizations about Somerville's and Ross's world views based on the reading of only two or three works rather than on the whole body of writing which extends from 1889 to 1949. Apart from superficial mention in biographical and critical books that have been published on Somerville and Ross, no true analysis of Mount Music exists, and I have found only two references to An Enthusiast. It is significant, however, that Somerville and Ross are no longer being omitted from discussions of Anglo-Irish literature, and, furthermore, that Kiberd has allotted a chapter to them in his recent literary history, Inventing Ireland.

### **Definitions of Anglo-Irish**

The term "Anglo-Irish" is so nebulous that some definitions are needed to clarify its use when it is applied to a group

of people. The Anglo-Irish are the descendants of the settlers who came from England (as distinct from Scotland) during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and who usually had been given grants of land for military or other services to the British Crown. They must be distinguished from the settlers who came to Ireland from England prior to the Reformation and who are known as "Old English." The Old English were originally Roman Catholic although some of these families did become Protestant after the Reformation for political reasons. The Anglo-Irish retained most of the "English" cultural connections: they were Anglicans, belonging to the Church of England, and they must, again, be distinguished from the Protestant dissenting families of Scottish origins who planted Ulster in the seventeenth century.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the Anglo-Irish generally and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. However problematic his contention, Theodore Allen, in his comparative study of racism in Ireland and the United States, represents the Protestant Ascendancy as racial supremacists, stating that "Irish history presents a case of racial oppression without reference to alleged skin color" (22). A. P. W. Malcomson, in his biography of John Foster (1740-1828), defines the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy as a class rather than an ethnic group and complicates his definition of the

Anglo-Irish by making a clear distinction between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Anglo-Irish.

The Anglo-Irish were a social elite rather than a strictly ethnic group. Thus, the humbler settlers in Ireland . . . belong ethnically but not socially to the Anglo-Irish, or rather were Anglo-Irish but not part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy--unless like Foster's family they rose to membership of it . . . By the same token, many families not ethnically Anglo-Irish were part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy by Foster's time . . . These families, whatever their ethnic background, had become part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy by conforming to Anglican communion, just as several Old English and Anglo-Irish families excluded themselves from it by conforming to Catholic faith. . . . For most of the eighteenth century, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy [my emphasis] held a virtual monopoly, legal or practical, of political power . . . However it must again be stressed that only the higher echelons of the Anglo-Irish as an ethnic group really belonged to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and really profited from this virtual monopoly. . . .

The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was, therefore, a narrow social and political elite to be defined along social and political rather than ethnic lines. (xviii-xix)<sup>12</sup>

The political power of the Ascendancy was eroded by the 1800 Act of Union when the Dublin parliament was dissolved. The gradual economic and social decline of the Anglo-Irish as a class, which culminated in the Land Wars of the 1880s, the rise of Parnell's Land Reform Party, and a series of the Land Acts, was almost completed by the turn of the century. Any political power that they might have retained was lost after the failure of the Irish Convention in 1918.<sup>13</sup>

As we need to differentiate between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Anglo-Irish, it is also important to distinguish between the land-owning class and the

Anglo-Irish. Not all landowners were Anglo-Irish,<sup>13</sup> nor were the Anglo-Irish all landlords (as Eagleton points out in Heath-cliff 44). It is therefore inaccurate to describe the Anglo-Irish as a class since, as Malcomson points out, the Anglo-Irish had included lower ranks from many British armies of occupation (xviii), and since, increasingly, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century their class interests became divided. Nevertheless, as Allen and others have posited, the lower ranks of the Anglo-Irish still had some privileges that the Catholic Irish did not have. Our purpose, however, is best served by Hugh A. Law's definition of the Anglo-Irish as a

section of our people differing from the rest very little in blood (since for centuries past we have been, all of us, of mixed race), but differing more or less widely in religious belief, or in social habits or in political associations, and infrequently in all three. Endless exceptions must be made; but for the present purpose it may be assumed that the typical Anglo-Irishman is Protestant in faith, has some connection with the land-owning class as it existed here from the end of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, and cherishes family tradition of service to the crown of these islands. (Qtd. in Torchiana 87)

F. S. L. Lyons characterizes the Anglo-Irish as conscious of being a privileged minority, "separated by race and religion from those whose lands their ancestors had seized" (Culture and Anarchy 18), as looking to England as the ultimate protector, and as regarding themselves as members of an empire. However, Lyons, like Malcomson, also



distinguishes between different social groups among the Anglo-Irish. He points out that the grand families intermarried with the English aristocracy while many of them rose high in imperial service. "Below them on the social scale, but possibly of more importance in the economic life and . . . a more vital force in the intellectual life . . . [was] the professional and entrepreneurial class" (19). Nevertheless, despite class differences amongst themselves and despite their declining power, J. C. Beckett argues that the Anglo-Irish still retained from their history a "sense of distinctiveness and superiority" (Anglo-Irish 119).

As we shall see in the novels of Somerville and Ross, by the beginning of the twentieth century, it is difficult to identify the Anglo-Irish as even a distinct class. This is especially true if we apply Karl Marx's definitions of a class, first, as an economic relationship or category, or, second, as a formation. In the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx states that people living

under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection . . . and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. (Qtd. in Raymond Williams 68)

Thus, after the establishment of the Free State and at the time of the publication of The Big House of Inver, the Anglo-Irish no longer constituted a class. While the Anglo-Irish had indeed constituted one of Marx's "'three great social classes . . . wage-laborers, capitalists and landlords' (Capital, III)" (qtd. in Williams 67), these categories were no longer relevant in a new bourgeois, capitalist state. Thus, in the final novel to be considered, clear distinctions between such definitions as lower, middle, and upper class become problematic.

#### **Questions of Nationality and Race**

The question of nationality, although by no means a simple issue, does not appear to be as problematic as that of class as far as Somerville and Ross were concerned. Like Stephen Gwynn, Sir Horace Plunkett, and other well-known Anglo-Irish figures of their day, Somerville and Ross considered themselves as, simply, Irish. As Somerville exclaimed, "My family has eaten Irish food and shared Irish life for nearly three hundred years, and if that doesn't make me Irish I might as well say I was Scottish or Mormon or Pre-Diluvian!" (Lewis, 165). Somerville and Ross were considered Irish by their English friends and acquaintances, and they differed culturally from the English, just as in their writing the English visitor to Ireland is always considered "foreign,"

even by the Anglo-Irish. However, in global terms, Somerville and Ross considered themselves as subjects of the British Empire,<sup>14</sup> as, technically, they were.

How, therefore, do we define nationality? Leerssen defines a nation as "a group of individuals who distinguish themselves, as a group, by a shared allegiance to what they consider to be their common identity." However, he does concede that "national definitions are protean and volatile" (Mere Irish 17). Nationality for him seems to depend upon which criteria one wishes to accept or reject to define nationality. Wisely, he suggests that we should consider nationality "as a relation rather than an identity" (22), "not as a discrete, self-contained idea, but as the expression of an international relationship" (25). Lyons also makes an important observation that the denotation, Anglo-Irish, was only attached to this group at about the end of the nineteenth century. He astutely points out that that "name was not of their seeking though it expresses very precisely the schizophrenia which was their natural condition" (Culture and Anarchy 18). He also states that "they had habitually called themselves simply 'Irish'" (18). What both Leerssen and Lyons also seem to be implying is that, in many cases, nationality may be a matter of choice. One can decide with which nation one wants to be identified, as well

as having one's nationality defined by others as in the case of the Anglo-Irish.

Nationality, however, becomes problematic when it is closely linked to and confused with the notion of race, especially in a "nation" struggling to define itself after centuries of colonial rule. At that point, nationality, like race, becomes exclusive rather than inclusive. In the nineteenth century race was not perceived as a social construct. Allen has argued that the penal laws enforced by the Protestant Ascendancy against the Catholic, native Irish during the eighteenth century are an example of religio-racial discrimination "which reduced all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonizing population" (32). Kevin Whelan, for example, states that in nineteenth-century Ireland a nation was "a people bound by blood, cemented by custom and a desire for political autonomy" (68). In this nineteenth-century context, nationality hinges on common ancestry, not on choice. Nicholas Hudson defines this concept of race as "a subdivision of the human species, identified by a shared appearance and other inherited traits" and derives from a "willingness" to analyze and classify the human race like plants or animals and a desire to divide the human race. Such a methodology leads inevitably to a hierarchy and the

categorization of one race as superior to another as L. P. Curtis has shown so clearly in his study of anti-Irish prejudice in nineteenth-century England. Anglo-Saxonism tried to show that in all respects the "English race" was racially and culturally superior to the "Irish race" justifying the argument that the Irish were unable to govern themselves. Curtis also points out the reverse situation, that nineteenth-century Irish "Celticism tried to accomplish for the 'Irish race' what Anglo-Saxonism had managed to do for the 'English race'" (Anglo-Saxons 15).

Luke Gibbons also sees a link between race, national identity, and "Celticism." He defines "Celticism" as the attempt to create a native culture "as a manifestation of an underlying racial or national 'character'" and suggests that it "sought to impose a racial uniformity on the state of flux that was Irish culture" ("Challenging the Canon" 563). This is an example of what Hudson sees as the lethal coupling of race and nation. In the nineteenth century, race meant

an innate and fixed disparity in the physical and intellectual makeup of different peoples. "Nation," in turn, was more than a group of people living under the same government. It was the very "soul" of personal identity, the very life-blood churning through an individual speaking a particular dialect in one of Europe's innumerable regions. (Hudson 258)

In the Irish context, Gibbons also notices that the term "race" was applied indiscriminately to "Celtic," "Gaelic," and "Irish" in the late nineteenth century but that

"Celticism" was later abandoned "as an alien Anglo-Irish imposition onto what was essentially a Gaelic, catholic tradition" (563).

Thus until the establishment of the Irish Republic (1949) and its final political separation from the United Kingdom, representations of race as they related to the national issue sometimes may have been more important political issues than representations of class; class and certainly gender issues were all subsumed in the struggle for national identity. Furthermore, at the founding of the Irish Free State (1922), Irish political parties were not established primarily on class relationships, as in England, but on the national question, the partition of Ireland, and Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom and the divisions which existed following the signing of the Treaty and during the Irish civil war.

#### **Irish Land Tenure 1849-1903**

All four novels that I will be examining in this dissertation are grounded in the social and personal struggle for the ownership of land either directly or indirectly, and, in many cases, moreover, there are also direct references to historical events in these novels. While considering the changes taking place in the relationship amongst the social classes and the growth of the Irish bourgeoisie during the 1890s, as

reflected in Somerville and Ross's The Real Charlotte, I believe it is vital to remember the tensions that characterized nineteenth-century Irish society, tensions which had existed previously but which had not been politically asserted, as well as the deep conflict of interests that separated landlord and tenant during their bitter confrontation regarding the ownership of the land during the second half of the nineteenth century which would, by the early 1900s, transform itself into a renewed nationalist struggle for independence from the United Kingdom.

In his classic history, Ireland Since the Famine, Lyons states that "one of the central themes of any history of Ireland since the Famine" is the "elemental conflict between the former owners of the land and those who had dispossessed them and reduced them to the status of tenants or labourers" (25). The history, moreover, of the second half of the nineteenth century, is also the narrative of the restoration of that land to those former owners, the native Irish, and its deliverance from those "who had dispossessed them," but who had, nevertheless, held that land--in the case, for example, of the Martins and the Somervilles--for several hundred years. Of course, in terms of human suffering, no loss of power or property on the part of the Anglo-Irish landlords could begin to compare in any degree to the deprivation and dispossession of a people who had suffered

famine and emigration and whose language and culture had been almost extinguished.<sup>13</sup>

The famine of 1845-47 was the beginning of the end for the Anglo-Irish landlord class, both economically and politically. Ten percent of the large landlords went bankrupt; rents had plummeted but rates had increased. Historians in the last forty years have largely exonerated the landlords as the perpetrators of the miserable economic conditions which led up to famine. Beckett characterizes the Irish landlords "as a body too poor, too incompetent, too selfish to initiate any general improvements themselves" (Making 352). Barbara Solow states that terms like "'good landlord' and 'bad landlord' have no place in a discussion with any analytical pretensions," (43) and Eagleton notes perceptively that "the ultimate responsibility for disaster . . . belongs . . . not with 'the landlords' or the British, but with the system they sustained" (25). Nevertheless, as R. F. Foster notes, landlords "were seen as to blame for the catastrophe by many--illogically, but understandably" (Modern Ireland 336). Solow concurs that it was England, of course, who had wronged Ireland and the "landlord was the visible embodiment of those historic wrongs" (43). Furthermore, it is important to remember that the image of the Anglo-Irish generally is often superimposed upon and confused with this



image of the cruel and ruthless landlord who evicted starving families.

Two years after 1847, the worst famine year, the Encumbered Estates Act was passed in 1849 enabling landlords whose properties had been entailed to sell. Foster states: "Irish estates worth £20,000,000 changed hands" (336). However, this land did not pass into the hands of the tenants but rather into the hands of local speculators. It should be pointed out that the one segment of rural society that had escaped ruin during the famine was the group of large farmers (often referred to as "strong farmers"<sup>16</sup>) who were occupied in livestock farming; in fact, their position improved during the famine years since the number of dry cattle probably doubled during 1841-1851 (Foster 336). Beckett points out that "of some 7,200 purchasers only 300 came from England or Scotland" (353). He also states:

The nationality of these new proprietors was, however, less important than their character. . . . A report on the relations between landlord and tenant, prepared for the chief secretary in 1869 by the poor-law inspectors, repeatedly draws attention to the hardship suffered by tenants on estates that had changed hands under the encumbered estates act. (353)

In 1860, the Deasy Act was passed which "removed the final traces of feudal relations between landlord and tenant at law and introduced important simplifications to land law" (Solow 8). In 1870, the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act was passed to check evictions and to secure to the tenants the

value of their improvements. Before this date, the insidious law of fixture obtained. This law stated that whatever was attached to the land became realty and was no longer the tenants' but a part of the land. Solow describes this as the doctrine of waste: an agricultural tenant who "increased the value of the property had no right of compensation at the end of his tenancy" (8). Clearly, this law of fixture acted as an disincentive for the tenant to improve either property or land. Solow argues that the Deasy Act was unsuccessful because the Act failed "to raise Ireland from a poor to a prosperous country" (88). By the 1870s, the "land question acquired a central importance, and that connection between land and politics . . . came to be generally recognized" (Beckett, Making 352).

In the mid-1870s, the Anglo-Irish landlord from Wicklow, Charles Stewart Parnell, was elected to Parliament as a member of Isaac Butt's Home Rule Party. In the early 1870s the Home Rule Party had demanded "the three Fs": fixity of tenure, fair rents, and free sale. Parnell had been content with these, but Lyons notes that "by 1877 he was already moving towards the idea of peasant ownership as the ultimate solution" (Ireland 165). In 1879, Parnell became the first president of the Land League which had been formed by Michael Davitt who had wanted the nationalization of the land rather than the change of ownership. The League initially aimed to

keep down rents, obstruct the ambitions of the land grabbers, and start boycotts; the long-term aim was to make the tenants owners of their farms: "'the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland'" (Lyons 167). Conor Cruise O'Brien, in Parnell and His Party, notes that Protestant landlords who supported home rule as a vague aspiration were numerous, but landlords, Catholic or Protestant, who supported the Land League were rare. Furthermore, home-rule landlords as a class were much less wealthy than the landlords of other parties, and presumably they saw their interests as being closer to those of the tenant farmers than those of the wealthier landlords. Like the Anglo-Irish, the landlord class cannot be viewed as a monolith either; it was economically and politically divided.

The 1881 Land Act granted "the three Fs." Lyons argues that this act "was clearly inadequate to meet the challenge with which the agricultural depression was confronting Ireland" (172), but he writes that Parnell must clearly have recognized the Act as a "major concession" on the part of the British government. Solow describes this act as "a legislative sentence of death by slow process against Irish landlordism" (167). Furthermore, she explains that rents peaked in 1880, but by the 1890s, they had fallen back. During the 1880s, agricultural output was low, there was famine, prices also fell as did farmers' incomes. Tenant farmers left the

land for the towns and cities. 1886 saw a renewal of the rent strikes which had occurred in the 1870s. In another land act of 1887 leaseholders were permitted to apply for rent reduction, but Solow notes that all rents fixed before 1886 were in fact lowered, and, by the early 1890s, rents must have fallen 28% from their 1881 level.

By the 1890s, the landlords were anxious to sell; but the question now, in this time of agricultural depression, was to whom? The British government, or rather, as Solow points out, the British tax payer, came to their assistance by means of the Ashborne Acts of 1885 and 1888.

The government would lend the tenants purchase money at an interest rate so low, and a repayment term so long, that they could buy the land for a smaller annual repayment than their current rents; then the landlord could get his price and the tenant his payment reduction at the same time. (186)

She notes, however, that there was no great exchange of property at this time. The 1903 Wyndham Land Act, followed by another in 1909, assured that repayments would stay below rents so that purchasers could be found to buy the land, and it also encouraged the sale of estates in their entirety, not just piecemeal. This act had been passed on the recommendation of a commission chaired by another Anglo-Irish landlord, Captain John Shaw-Taylor, nephew of Lady Gregory. Lyons notes that between "1903 and 1920 nearly nine million acres had changed hands and two million acres more were in the

process of being sold" (Ireland 219). Although the economic rule of the Anglo-Irish landlords had been crushed, and although their political power would be annihilated after 1918, the Big Houses that survived dominated the landscape, and the Anglo-Irish remained a "privileged minority" even after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Martins and the Somervilles**

Into this background can be read the histories of the Somervilles and the Martins, landlords of Cork and Galway. A brief account of their origins and lives provides an important context for the reading of the novels providing almost text-book examples of more recent Anglo-Irish representations, examples of the paradoxes and ironies implied by the term, Anglo-Irish, as well as Somerville's and Ross's representations of the class with which they identify.<sup>16</sup> Because they had originally come to Ireland during the reign of Henry II, the Martins were part of the Old English, having settled in Ireland before the Reformation. In Irish Memories, Martin Ross stresses the peaceful co-existence and practice of the two religions at Ross. Her great-grandfather had become Protestant in order to marry a Protestant neighbor although it was "certainly probable" that he died a Catholic. His six children, however, were Protestant, "yet they lived in an entirely Roman Catholic district without religious

friction of any kind" (7). Martin Ross herself was baptized by a Catholic priest; during her childhood, mass was celebrated at Ross; and her brother, Robert, was educated by an ex-hedge schoolmaster, James Tucker (21).

Martin Ross writes of the horror of the famine, of the soup-kitchen that was established at Ross: "the cattle that the people could not feed were bought from them, and boiled down, and the gates were locked to keep back the crowd that pressed for the ration." She describes also the plight of her family, torn between their own needs and the devastation of the people, and the catastrophe which would finally ensue in the loss of their estates. "Without rents, with poor rate at 22s. 6d. in the pound, the household of Ross staggered through the intimidating years, with the starving tenants hanging, as it were, upon its skirts, impossible to feed, impossible to see unfed" (16). Ross's words echo those of contemporary historians as she analyzes the fate of her class: "[l]andlords who had escaped ruin at the time were more slowly ruined as time went on and the money borrowed in the hour of need exacted its toll" (17-18).

After the Great Famine, "[l]ife at Ross was of the traditional Irish kind with many retainers at low wages, which works out as a costly establishment with nothing to show for it" (24), and Ross writes of the debt and low rents which followed 1847. She blames the land acts for destroying

the relationship between landlord and tenant, a relationship which undoubtedly benefitted the landlord far more than the tenant.

Throughout her life, Martin Ross retained the paternalistic outlook typical of many landlords, often referring to the peasants as "children." She argues that the land acts passed to benefit the tenants made no difference at Ross since her "soft-hearted" father had always treated his tenants with--paternalistic--generosity. The final blow for the Martin family came in 1872 when the tenants voted against their landlord and elected a Home Rule candidate. This act of defiance and independence on the part of the Ross tenants was believed to have been the blow which led to her father's illness and death a few months later. Ross always remained, as she said herself, "an incorrigible Unionist." The same year, Martin Ross and her mother left their demesne and moved to north Dublin where they lived in genteel poverty.

Although they were also Anglo-Irish, the Somervilles' history and politics differed somewhat from the Martins'. The Somervilles were Episcopalians who came to Ireland in 1690. Although the Somervilles remained Protestant, the biographers stress that they too enjoyed an excellent relationship with their Catholic tenants. Nevertheless, they were also adversely affected by the Land Wars; there are many references in Edith's diaries to rents being withheld during the

eighties. A comment also insinuates that the Somerville's financial situation improved after the marriage of one of the sons to a young woman who had 500 pounds a year (Lewis 29).<sup>17</sup>

In Irish Memories, Somerville briefly refers to the changes that took place in Drishane as a result of the Land League. During the 1880s, Somerville also experienced the starvation of the people at first hand. What is evident in Somerville's writing are the contradictions felt by many Anglo-Irish who lived in close proximity to their tenants. Somerville also objects to the Land Acts, not because they destroyed the relationship between landlord and tenant, but because of their deleterious effects on the peasant farmers:

Successive alterations of the existing land tenure had bewildered rather than encouraged the primitive farmers of this southern seaboard; the benefits promised were slow in materialising, and in the meantime the crops failed. The lowering or remission of rents did not mean any immediate benefit to people who were often many years in arrears. Even in normal years the yield of the land, in the district of which I speak, barely sufficed to feed the dwellers on it; the rent, when paid, was in most cases, sent from America, by emigrated sons and daughters. There was but little margin at any time. In bad years there was hunger. (140)

Edith was sent out to discover where there was the greatest want, and the needy would then be sent to Mrs. Somerville who was one of the chief distributors for the parish of Balfour's Relief Fund of 1891 (144). Despite her ambivalent attitude towards the Anglo-Irish, Somerville's belief in their



fundamental benevolence must date back to these times and to the examples of her parents.

### **The Collaboration and Beyond**

In January, 1886, Martin Ross visited Castletownsend, and the cousins met for the first time. That summer Somerville and Ross began their first collaborative work: The Budh Dictionary: A Dictionary of Words and Phrases in Past and Present Use among the Budhs.<sup>22</sup> In 1887, Martin went to Paris to join Edith, who had been studying art in London, Paris and Dusseldorf, and that fall Edith suggested that they collaborate. Their first novel, An Irish Cousin, was a critical and financial success. It was published under their pen names Geilles Herring and Martin Ross in deference to their mothers who objected to their literary ambitions.

Until the death of Martin Ross's mother in 1906, Somerville and Ross were separated for long periods of time by family duties; very often neither of them could afford the train fare between Cork and Galway. During this time also Ross was writing for the London-based magazine, The World, and they both began writing travel articles for The Lady's Pictorial which were later published in book form. According to Hilary Robinson, Ross spent all her earnings on the family house of Ross (16). At the same time, they were also collaborating on a second novel, Naboth's Vineyard (1891),

which is interesting for its extensive use of dialect and its realistic account of a boycott. They were also at work on The Real Charlotte, which was begun in November 1889 and published in 1894. In the early nineties, they continued their travel writing on the Bordeaux region of France, North Wales, Denmark, and the Aran Islands which they visited earlier than Synge.

After the publication of The Real Charlotte in 1894, Ross was feted in Scotland as one of its authors while Somerville made another visit to Paris. In 1895, following her mother's death, Somerville, the elder daughter, assumed the responsibilities of the house. She began a violet farm, the first of many entrepreneurial ventures. Three years later, after her father's death, Somerville took over the management of the estate since all the brothers were overseas. Biographers also believe that at this time she finally refused a marriage proposal (Lewis 40).<sup>22</sup> Around 1898 she and Ross joined the suffragette movement; they also began to learn Irish. They were both passionate riders and hunters, but, in November of this year, Ross suffered a bad fall from her horse, an incident which seriously affected her health for the rest of her life.

In 1899, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross published Some Experiences of An Irish R. M. whose first edition of 3000 copies sold out in a month. It was reprinted twenty times.

The success of these humorous stories made their literary partnership famous throughout the English-speaking world, but, more importantly, it gave them both some financial security for a few years. Again, Somerville and Ross were distracted from writing new material by other events in their lives although they were capitalizing from their recent celebrity by publishing earlier articles in book form, and they were able to publish a new novel, Dan Russell the Fox (1911). Two more volumes of Irish R. M. stories followed, one in 1908, two years after Ross had come to live at Castletownsend following the death of her mother, and another in 1915, the same year as Ross's death.

During the years that they published the Irish R. M. stories, Somerville was involved in many other social, political, and financial ventures, activities which were rare for a woman of the Anglo-Irish gentry. In 1903, Somerville became Master of the West Carberry Foxhounds, a position which always been held by a man. In 1906, she and her sister acquired a farm of 300 acres and became the first to import Frisian cattle into Ireland in 1909. At this time also, Somerville and Ross both became increasingly active suffragists, and, in 1910, they became the first President and Vice-President of the Munster Women's Franchise League (Lewis 215).<sup>13</sup>

After Ross's death in 1915 following a brief illness, Somerville remained active in Castletownsend and published collections of their stories and magazine articles. In 1919 and 1921 she published Mount Music and An Enthusiast which dealt with the contemporary religious and political situation in Ireland. At this time, Somerville, who was now in her sixties, completed some very successful artistic and financial ventures with two exhibitions and sales of her paintings in London Galleries, and, in 1929, she traveled to the U.S. for the same purpose. During the economic depression of the thirties, Somerville, determined to save the family home, Drishane, began to sell the Somerville and Ross manuscripts and to export horses to America.

The last twenty years of Somerville's life were far from uneventful or anonymous. In 1936, her favorite brother, "her staunch fellow nationalist" (Lewis 176), Admiral Boyle was murdered by the I. R. A. She received condolences from de Valera, the President of the Free State. In memory of Boyle, she established a seat outside the gates of Drishane with the words in Irish, "comharsa maith" ("good neighbor"). Somerville also received many honors. In 1932, Trinity College awarded her the degree of Doctor of Letters and Yeats invited her to become a founding member of the Irish Academy of Letters. In 1934, the Irish R. M. stories were included in the Oxford Companion to English Literature. In the last

decade of her life, Edith Somerville received the Gregory Gold Medal, the most important literary award of the I.A.L.; Oxford University Press republished The Real Charlotte in their World Classics Series in 1948.

Three years before Somerville died, she and her sister were moved out of Drishane, the house having passed to a male heir. Shortly before her death at ninety-one, she had published her last book. Edith Somerville left seven hundred and nine pounds. Drishane, however, one of the few Big Houses to have endured, still remains the property of the Somervilles. Today it houses the Somerville Archives.

This brief examination of the lives of Somerville and Ross and the circumstances in which they lived and wrote begins to reveal how they attempted to resist the hegemony of the patriarchy. In the study of the novels, I will examine how, in relation to other classes, races and religions, Somerville and Ross reinvented themselves as single women in a patriarchal society, as daughters of the gentry turned entrepreneurs, and as (Anglo-)Irish in a predominantly Gaelic, Catholic state.

### **Endnotes**

: Throughout this dissertation I will always use her pen name, Martin Ross. Her real name was Violet Martin. From the writers' earliest meeting, her cousin and collaborator, Edith Somerville, always referred to Violet by her last name, Martin.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss and delineate the term "Anglo-Irish" later in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> C. L. Graves, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Terry Eagleton, and Richard Tillinghast all describe it as a "masterpiece." Richard Fallis calls it "one of the best Irish novels of the nineteenth century" (135), Seamus Deane "a remarkable novel" (Short History 204); and John Cronin describes it as "the finest novel of the nineteenth century" (Somerville and Ross 101).

<sup>4</sup> It is with these short stories that their literary partnership has, until quite recently, most often been associated.

<sup>5</sup> The designation "native Irish" is problematic. Joep Leerssen makes the following distinction: "'Irish' are all inhabitants of that island; 'native Irish' or 'Gaels' are those inhabitants of Ireland whose ancestors were settled in Ireland prior to 1169; their language is called Gaelic, Irish-Gaelic or Irish" (Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael 457). The Old English, who were Catholic, must also be included in this group since they too were dispossessed under the Penal Laws. To use the term with any certainty, however, one would need to retrace 700 hundred years of history; in addition, by the nineteenth century the use of Gaelic was already disappearing. As James Joyce states, "What race, or what language . . . can boast of being pure today? And no race has less right to utter such a boast than the race now living in Ireland" (Critical Writings 165-66, qtd. in James Joyce, The Dead). Although the term denotes race, I would argue that it also refers to class. Thus the "native Irish" would refer to those who possibly settled in Ireland before 1169 and who were dispossessed of their lands by other settlers and colonizers and reduced to the status of landless peasants and who were later persecuted under the penal laws. The term cannot imply racial purity, however. Thus in this dissertation I will use term "native Irish" to designate lower-class peasants whose culture is Gaelic. When analyzing representations of race and religion, this term may also apply to characters who are Catholic and who have moved from the peasant class to the middle class but whose culture also remains predominantly Gaelic. No other class of native Irish exists in the writing of Somerville and Ross.

<sup>6</sup> I have omitted a discussion of the short stories of Some Experiences of an Irish R. M. because short stories are of a different genre to the novel.

<sup>7</sup> Somerville was aware of the different readings of Irish history. In Mount Music, An Enthusiast, and The Big House of Inver, there are incidents in which two or more versions of history are presented.

<sup>8</sup> Leerssen states that the designation "stereotypes" struggles "under the connotations of changelessness and stability" (Mere Irish 457).

<sup>9</sup> Martin Ross, however, had been quick to dispel their debt to the French realist by pointing out that neither of them had ever read Balzac (Powell 65), but the connection has persisted into the 1970s. Richard Fallis notes erroneously that Charlotte Mullen was "rather obviously based on Balzac's Cousine Bette" (135).

<sup>10</sup> Guy Fehlmann's work on Somerville and Ross is the most complete and analytical study that exists, especially his analysis of their treatment of the middle classes. However, I have come across very few references to Fehlmann's book in my reading. I can only assume that the explanation must rest on the fact that it has never been translated into English. It is important to note that their representation of this class differs according to their purposes for writing. A different representation of peasants may exist in the short stories, the travel writing, the essays, and the novels. Here we are concerned only with the latter.

<sup>11</sup> We must also distinguish between the Ascendancy and the Anglo-Irish because our reading, our image of the Anglo-Irish has been largely colored, as Deane notes, by Yeats's representation of the Anglo-Irish as the Irish of the Ascendancy and as an elite aristocracy ("Yeats and the Idea"), on the one hand, and by the condemnation of the Ascendancy by Daniel Corkery in The Hidden Ireland on the other. Furthermore, the image of the Anglo-Irish as the class of the landed gentry had, since the nineteenth century, also been associated with the emotive image of the landlord with all its negative connotations associated with evictions, hunger, and emigration.

<sup>12</sup> A brief discussion of the Convention is included in chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Whelan, in "An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," demonstrates that in the eighteenth century there was a rising middle-class of prosperous catholic big farmers who purposely maintained an inconspicuous and cautious low-profile.

<sup>14</sup> A similar situation exists today in the case of Northern Ireland. The ordinary English person does not always differentiate between the different cultures and histories of the Ulster people; they are all dismissed as Irish. Young Loyalists who travel to England for football games are horrified when they are labelled "Paddy" by the English since they regard themselves proudly as Northern Irish, subjects of the Queen, and citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

<sup>15</sup> Emigration, of course, has continued right up to the end of the twentieth century, but not on the same scale, although in 1965, it was over 20,000 (Lyons, Ireland 632).

<sup>16</sup> See Kevin Whelan (34) for a definition of a strong farmer.

<sup>17</sup> See Kurt Bowen.

<sup>18</sup> A background to the historical events which took place after the publication of The Real Charlotte (1894) and up to the publication of The Big House of Inver (1925) is provided at the beginning of chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> In Irish Memories, a compilation of Edith Somerville's and Martin Ross's memoirs and family narratives, one can read the personal histories of two Anglo-Irish families, the Somervilles and the Martins, which often closely parallel the accounts of professional historians. Here Somerville reprints Martin Ross's account of her brother, Robert Martin, born in 1846, which begins with a description of the "intimate relations of landlord and tenant . . . at Ross" (4), dating back to the reign of Henry II.

<sup>20</sup> Arranged marriages were commonplace among the Anglo-Irish and the peasant classes in Ireland at this time. This topic will be explored in chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> A Budh is anyone who was descended from their great-grandfather, a Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, Charles Kendal Bushe.

<sup>22</sup> In her late teens and early twenties, Somerville formed a romantic relationship with a cousin, Hewitt Poole. It is believed that Somerville's father refused Hewitt's proposal because of his lack of money and prospects. In 1880 Hewitt married as did her cousin Ethel to whom Somerville was deeply attached. During this period her biographers surmise that Edith abandoned the idea of marriage and chose to devote



herself to her career as an artist. One of her biographers, Maurice Collis, constructs the argument for Somerville's lesbianism. I have not pursued the question of Somerville's and Ross's lesbianism in my study, but Shawn R. Mooney discusses the issue of their sexuality in "'Colliding Stars:' Heterosexism in Biographical Representations of Somerville and Ross." However, from my reading of their letters and journals, I concur with Roz Cowman that "from internal evidence, it can be seen that their way of life in nineteenth-century Ireland would render unlikely any physical sexuality between them" (88).

<sup>23</sup> Although Somerville is mentioned in two studies of the suffragette movement in Ireland, no research has been done on the authors' connection with the Franchise League.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESISTING THE PATRIARCHY

Many Somerville and Ross novels resist the patriarchal organization of Irish society, but they resist it particularly in their representation of the institution of marriage and in the representation of gender. However, in their representations of the power struggle that ensues between the colonizing patriarchy and those who resist it, the patriarchy is usually successful. Heidi Hartman defines patriarchy as the "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (qtd. in Sedgwick 3). Marriage in Somerville and Ross is represented as the repressive instrument of the patriarchy that oppresses both men and women irrespective of class, race or religion. However, marriage is the institution that is most closely related to the ownership of land. Land in nineteenth century Ireland was still the predominant source of wealth. Marriage, which always included the exchange of property, was nearly always an alliance between two families closely connected to the land as owners or laborers. Therefore, those who are most closely connected to the land--the peasant classes, the tenant farmers, and the landed gentry--are those whose lives are also most immediately

affected by its oppressive nature within the context of the patriarchal society. Nowhere in the writing of Somerville and Ross is marriage, and what Ann Owens Weekes describes as "the tyranny of gender" that accompanies it, more thoroughly explored than in The Real Charlotte.

As single women of the gentry, Somerville and Ross had first-hand knowledge of the tyranny of the patriarchy as we have already seen from their biographies. This experience is reflected in their novels. Martin Ross saw her mother being replaced as head of the house by her brother and sister-in-law. Edith Somerville was probably not allowed to marry Hewitt Poole because of his impecunious situation. Her experience was not unusual. Women must marry; they must marry men whom their parents had selected, men of similar rank and religion, and men with property. T. R. Henn explains that it was "essential" that the daughters of the gentry marry since their entering a profession was "unthinkable." If they did not marry, their prospects were grim: they would spend their lives as maiden aunts or in a dower house. In order to marry, however, they had to have a dowry.

So it came about that many estates became encumbered with complicated marriage settlements, trusts of all kinds, and the raising of first or second mortgages on the 'property.' Such things were of little concern in Jane Austen's day, when death-duties were negligible and income tax did not exist. They mattered a great deal in 1912. (211)

George Moore documented the desperate lives of single young gentry women of a slightly earlier period in A Drama in Muslin. But even well into the twentieth century, a similar situation persisted.<sup>1</sup> Marriage--and most frequently, an arranged marriage--was the inevitable fate (a word that echoes throughout the novel) for all women, but particularly for women of the upper- and peasant classes in the period in which Somerville and Ross were writing.

Somerville and Ross were aware of their lack of autonomy as daughters of the gentry in determining the course of their own lives and in making choices, to the point even of not being able to name themselves as authors. More significantly, they were aware also of the parallel situation that existed in the lives of their tenants. In a revealing essay entitled "In Sickness and in Health," Martin Ross describes in wonderful detail the lives of some of her family's tenants in Galway, focusing on births, weddings, and deaths. She describes the financial arrangements that took place during a match-making, and she explains how the whole affair is based on money and land.

The day before the marriage the battle was waged in the usual manner between the Loughrea brother and bridegroom; greasy pound notes were slapped down on the table, the bride's savings were vaunted above the bridegroom's heifers and position as heir to his mother's bit of land, and with swaggering and bluff and whiskey drinking the bargain was concluded. Nothing could have been more frankly commercial; nothing apparently could have given more satisfaction. The cook

departed, and lived in a cabin with a variety of relatives, who were by no means overjoyed at the circumstances; potatoes for dinner, and stewed tea morning, noon and night were her diet; the hens roosted above her bed, she weeded turnips and "spread" turf, she grew thin and pale, but never so far as is known, did she repine, or regret the print dresses and the flesh-pots. The butcher's driver was "a quiet boy," better than most husbands; had it been the broom-maker, foxy in the face she would have made him an equally good wife. In a community where old maids are almost unknown, the only point worth considering was that she was married and had a "young son," and every man and woman in the country would have said that she was right. . .

Writers of novels, and readers of novels, had better shut their eyes to the fact, the inexorable fact, that such marriages are rushed into every day--loveless, sordid marriages, such as we are taught to hold in abhorrence, and that from them springs, like a flower from a dust heap, the unsullied, uneventful home-life of Western Ireland. (159-60)

What is immediately obvious from the above description is, of course, the commercial aspect of the triangular relationship between the groom, the bride (who is the cook for the Big House), and the bride's brother. However, in this relationship, the bride is no equal partner; she is totally powerless and is, in fact, the object which creates the relationship between the two men; a relationship which is later concluded in the bond of alcohol.<sup>2</sup> Ross also comments on the groom's youth, the exigency of the marriage, whatever the consequences, and the absence of sexuality between the couple. Such observations reflect social conditions amongst the peasantry in Ireland at the time, conditions which will also be fictionalized in the novels of Somerville and Ross.

### **Marriage and Its Relation to Gender and Class**

Much of the criticism of Somerville and Ross focusses on their representation of the rural population, of their position as outsiders, often as patronizing outsiders. However, a study of The Real Charlotte and the representation of marriage and gender in the novel will demonstrate their intimate knowledge of the customs, traditions, and attitudes of the rural population of Ireland, without, of course, belonging to that class. Undoubtedly, Somerville and Ross became suffragists and feminists first because of their own powerless positions as women of the gentry. Their awareness of their own powerless situation, however, led them to an understanding of the powerless situation of all women in Ireland regardless of class. This consciousness led them in turn to an understanding of the capriciousness and injustice of the tyranny of gender and class. Gender, unlike sex, is a cultural rather than a biological construct that is acquired according to one's "characteristics and activities" (18).<sup>3</sup> Our gender and hence "our identity is both formed and manifested through social relationship" (179).<sup>4</sup> In the Irish patriarchy of the 1890s, and well into the second half of the twentieth century, a woman's gender identity was defined almost completely by her role as wife and mother. The gender role, of course, was vital for the continuation of the

patriarchy that needed to keep women active as child-bearers and to prevent them from obtaining positions of power and authority in society. Gender-specific roles, however, do not limit women's lives alone; they also curtail men's autonomy in developing their own individual identities.

Certainly an understanding of the patriarchy in Ireland, which affected both men and women, also led Somerville and Ross to an awareness of the social problems that existed among people and among classes other than their own. What is surprising in this novel, in view of their own class position as women of the declining gentry, is the sympathy with which the authors can represent the situation of lower- and middle-class women, such as Lucy Lambert, Francie Fitzpatrick, Julia Duffy, and Charlotte Mullen. Although class antagonism still persists in the novel, often expressed in superficial but irresistible remarks regarding social behavior and personal characteristics, The Real Charlotte is a remarkable expose of an unjust, materialistic, and economically-driven society where physical beauty, wealth, class and position determine the course of individual lives. It is a society where only those with ruthless ambition will survive but at the terrible cost of their own personal happiness and fulfillment.

The Real Charlotte focuses both on the resistance to marriage and its accompanying tyranny of gender, required by the patriarchy so that the institution of marriage will

flourish, and on the "tyranny of circumstance" which impels that resistance to fail. Many characters in the novel, therefore, do not fit the gender stereotypes expected of them by society; they resist marriage, and, by so doing, subvert the status quo. Certainly the world of The Real Charlotte would provide a motive for that resistance, for in this world "happy" or "successful" marriages do not exist. There is no affection between marriage partners, no companionship, no mutual respect; sexual desire exists only outside of marriage. Marriage for both men and women results from economic necessity; in each relationship in the novel, one of the partners has been motivated primarily by financial need, and, although marriage partners are not separated by religion or significant class differences, disparities of age predominate. If marriage is a microcosm of the society in which it exists, Somerville and Ross are bitter critics of that society, including their own class, the landed gentry. Moreover, in the representation of the Dysart's marriage, the authors present their first attack on their crumbling society.

In the small country town of Lismoye, which provides this novel's setting, the Dysarts of Bruff are the inhabitants of the "Big House" and the major land owners. Although they represent the center of society in the novel, that position of authority and power is very clearly being eroded



both from without and within, and nowhere is this clearer than in the marriage of the parents, the characterization of their children, and their attitude to marriage. The patriarch, Sir Benjamin, suffered a stroke six years earlier caused by "a paroxysm of apoplectic jealousy" at the news of his tenants' rejoicing at his son's coming of age. Physically powerless and confined to a wheel-chair, he wields his stick and seems to be understood only by his faithful retainer, James Canavan, who has become the intermediary "between him and the rest of the world." Clearly, Sir Benjamin is the stock figure of the authoritative father deposed by the son, symbolizing the impotent rage of a dying class.

Rather than being burdened by the old man's incapacity, Lady Dysart is freed by it, but her situation seems typical of her class and gender. The narrator informs us that "Lady Dysart had in her youth married, with a little judicious coercion, a man thirty years older than herself, and after a long, and, on the whole, extremely unpleasant period of matrimony, she was now enjoying a species of Indian summer" (48). The narrator is unequivocal; this marriage has not been simply loveless, it has been "extremely unpleasant." In this instance, no difference can be detected between the narrator's and Lady Dysart's voice. In a later scene, another married but childless woman, Lucy Lambert, asks her

rhetorically, "'What are children compared to the husband?'" The authors' irony leaves the reader in no doubt as to Lady Dysart's real answer. "'Oh--er--of course not,'" said Lady Dysart, with something less than her usual conviction of utterance, her thoughts flying to Sir Benjamin and his bath chair" (96). Nevertheless, despite her thirty years of unpleasantness, Lady Dysart is not represented as her husband's victim, and her husband's authority having been removed, she has finally come into her Indian summer.

The representation of Lucy Lambert, on the other hand, is different. Of the many women in Somerville and Ross novels, she is one of the rare women for whom pity mingles with contempt. In common with all the other married characters in the novel, Lucy is to some degree a victim of the patriarchy, but she is also the victim of her own stupidity. Referred to throughout by the narrator as the "turkey hen," she does not have even the wit to realize that she is unhappy, as her husband, Roddy Lambert remarks, "'I wish everyone was as satisfied with her life as she is'" (33). Several years older than he, she kindly entertains Francie, the young Dublin woman her husband is in love with, and we are told she "held no spark of jealousy of her beauty and youth" (32). When Charlotte Mullen finally forces the reality of her husband's infidelity upon her, the knowledge kills her.

Lucy is stupid, dull, lethargic, prematurely middle-aged, yet, although she is older than him, she has managed to "procure" the handsome Lambert, agent to the Dysarts, because she has inherited eight thousand pounds "ground out by her late father's mills." In spite of their seeming good fortune, the couple are not viewed as successes. Lucy Lambert is regarded by Lismoyle society as a failure since she is childless, and, surprisingly perhaps, "her spouse was regarded with a certain regretful pity as the victim of circumstance" (24). Two important observations should be made here. First, that Lucy is regarded as a failure because of "her" inability to produce children demonstrates both the authors' knowledge of rural attitudes as well as their understanding that many of these "middle-class" town folk were only one generation or two away from the land and still retained the values of small farmers. In their study, Family and Community in Ireland, Arensberg and Kimball quote a woman in the chapter on farm marriages as remarking, "'No matter how much money you have and how good-looking you are, if you don't have children, you're no good'" (131). Secondly, it should be noted that Lambert himself, not Lucy, is described by the narrator as the "victim of circumstance." Women are not always represented as the victims of men; on the contrary, men and women are both represented as victims of the patriarchy. It is not men who are cruel and unjust in the

novel, rather the system. As Guy Fehlmann has pointed out, Somerville and Ross always refuse to judge (138). The authors chronicle the Lamberts' domestic life in detail. Thus a Lismoyle matron informs the reader that Lambert spends his days away from home, not always on business but "flourishing about the country in his dog-trap." After dinner, the couple doze at intervals and snore. Clearly, Lambert has married for money, not love. The patriarchy destroys the lives of all human beings regardless of gender.

Lambert's second marriage is an ironic parody of the first. In this case, Lambert marries Francie, a penniless, lower middle-class Dubliner, with whom he has been infatuated since the very first pages of the novel. Like Sir Benjamin, Lambert is many years older than his new wife. The tyranny of the patriarchy does not distinguish between classes in The Real Charlotte. However, circumstances, not family, have persuaded Francie to marry Lambert, with disastrous consequences. Francie was previously in love with a young English officer, Hawkins, but since she has no dowry, the officer has deserted her in favor of an English heiress, leaving Francie heart-broken. After a suitable interval, Lambert, now a widower, proposes to her. The narrator explains.

She had never pretended either to him or to herself that she was in love with him; her engagement had been the inevitable result of poverty, and aimlessness, and bitterness of soul, but her instinctive leniency towards any man who liked her, joined with her old friendliness

for Mr. Lambert, made it as easy a way out of her difficulties as any she could have chosen. There was something flattering in the knowledge of her power over a man whom she had been accustomed to look up to.  
(271)

Francie is honest about her motives; economic and social circumstances propel her into the marriage. She is an optimist, but she is also a realist. She knows that without money and without a profession her future will be bleak. However, even at this low ebb in her fortunes, the woman is again not represented totally as the victim. Francie realizes that as a woman she still has sexual power over Lambert. Repeatedly, women in Somerville and Ross's novels are represented as the characters with power, be it sexual, intellectual, or economic. Sadly, however, Francie's sexual domination of Lambert destroys them both. Unable to dominate her emotionally and to win her love, Lambert ruins himself financially in his efforts to conquer her with material wealth. Unhappy in her marriage, Francie is killed in a riding accident on the way to an assignation with her former lover, Gerald Hawkins. Francie's marriage parallels Lambert's first marriage. Like Lambert, she has married for money, and she too has sought romantic love elsewhere.

Francie, however, along with several other characters in the novel, has valiantly resisted marriage. Even when the most eligible bachelor, the heir of Bruff, Christopher Dysart, hints at a proposal, she rejects him: "'I can paddle

my own canoe,'" and, "'I can look after myself,'" she says. Though penniless, Francie is wonderfully independent, optimistic, and spirited. No wonder Somerville and Ross thought of her as their favorite creation. Later in the novel, she asserts to her aunt, Charlotte, "I'm not afraid of being an old maid" (224), a courageous and defiant statement in nineteenth-century Ireland and in the world of The Real Charlotte, frequented by such repellent examples of single women as the insane Julia Duffy and the bitter Charlotte Mullen.

In spite of the narrator's class antagonism towards Francie, the "Dublin jackeen," she is allowed an interval of autonomy and granted the strength of character to resist a loveless but highly desirable match. Of course, an element of doubt and ambiguity always remains in the world of Somerville and Ross where characters are so often divided by class, race, and religion. It is quite possible that the authors could not conceive of a match between two characters who, although they are of the same religion, are so obviously divided by class. Furthermore, in a novel which continually demonstrates the gulf that separates one class from another, a happy and lasting alliance between Francie and Christopher Dysart would be highly improbable and unrealistic. As J. J. Lee points out, even "[m]ixed marriages, between farmers and

labourers were considered unnatural" (Modernisation 4). Anglo-Irish society could not envision Francie as Lady Dysart, the mistress of Bruff; her marriage to Lambert, on the other hand, does not subvert the status quo. She marries within her class, not for love but for middle-class security. Ironically, of course, Francie is sadly deceived since Lambert's generosity towards herself has rendered him bankrupt. Somerville and Ross could not leave Francie with Lambert, however; nor could they disgrace her with an illicit affair with Hawkins. Their only solution, as Mrs. Somerville pointed out, was to kill her.

Francie has resisted the patriarchy and (not surprisingly) failed. Throughout the novel, despite her high spirits, independence, and "staunchness of soul," Francie has been represented as a passive, saleable commodity in the patriarchy, "one of the objects in the exchange" (Sedgwick 26), rather than as one of the partners in the match-making. Francie is always the object in the constantly changing triangles of desire in the novel. Dysart and Lambert discuss her relationship with Hawkins in her absence, and Lambert demeans her in a vulgar and abusive manner: "I can tell you I've known that girl since she was the length of my stick, and I never once saw her that she wasn't up to some game or other" (184). She is objectified as a commodity by Charlotte and by three male characters in the novel. But as she is

objectified, she is also idealized by both Dysart (209) and Lambert (270). Francie, unlike Lucy Lambert, perceives what is happening to her. Francie is dehumanized by Dysart, Hawkins, and Lambert, but she also dehumanizes men and stereotypes them. "They are all the same" (249), she remarks. Once again, the narrator makes it clear that in the marketplace, women are not the only commodities. In the patriarchy which assigns fixed gender roles, men as well as women are objectified and commodified. Earlier in the novel, as she thought of Christopher Dysart, who was different from other men, Francie had modified her attitude to men: "She had been accustomed to see men as trees walking, beings about whose individuality of character she did not trouble herself; generally they made love to her, and, if they did not, she presumed that they did not care about her, and gave them no further attention" (214). Clearly, Francie also objectified men, but her relationship with Dysart has taught her that men too are individual human beings. Dysart is different not because of his class, but because of his resistance to marriage and to fixed gender roles.

### **The Social Construction of Gender**

In sharp contrast, therefore, to Francie and to her doomed attempt to resist marriage, or, more precisely, to resist a loveless marriage, are the two eligible young



Dysarts, Pamela and Christopher. Both have successfully thwarted the ambitions of their mother, the demands of the patriarchy, and the necessity of their class to reproduce itself. Their resistance to marriage derives not from their strength of character but rather from their dispositions and from their financial security. The Anglo-Irish world may be decaying, but Christopher is still described as a "prosperous" young man. Dysart and his sister Pamela never struggle to resist marriage--they have no inclination to marry; at least Dysart shows none until he meets Francie, but even then he readily surrenders her to Hawkins. Pamela, kind, sympathetic, tactful, conciliatory, and humorous seems to be completely at ease in her situation as model daughter, "true friend," and "good angel" (115).

Much has been made of the authors' sympathy towards the Anglo-Irish characters. Certainly, Somerville and Ross liked Pamela; perhaps they even envied her detachment. But Pamela is completely removed from the intrigues and passions of the novel's plot, and she is equally removed from worldly affairs. She seems to be fulfilled by her family, her church, and her animals. Marriage could not fulfill any emotional or financial need for her. In a scene near the end of the novel, Lady Dysart deplores "Pamela's 'hopeless friendliness' towards men, and Mrs. Gascogne had admitted that there might be something discouraging to a man being

treated as if he were a younger sister" (316). This last, thoughtless remark which confuses gender construction raises a question that pervades the novel and that pervades the representation of several major and minor characters, even the animals. This confusion of gender, moreover, is most persistent amongst those characters who resist assimilation into the patriarchy or who refuse to be obliterated by its repression.

Christopher Dysart is a character who, in certain circumstances, resists the patriarchy and who, consequently, is a character whose gender is unstable. This instability explains why Francie finds him "different." To use Roddy Lambert's term, Dysart is an "effeminate" young aristocrat, suffering from ennui, lethargy, and "self-pity" (286). He is a character who appears to have more in common with European fin-de-siecle literary society than Anglo-Irish society. He is described as "shy," and "docile"; he is artistic; like several of the Somervilles, he is a photographer more interested in recording "groups of old women and donkeys" (46) than meeting attractive, marriageable young women. He does not hunt; he admits to Francie that he is a "bad rider" (181) and frightened of horses. The narrator explains clearly how Dysart fails to live up to the expectations of Anglo-Irish society and the gender roles of the patriarchy.

It is deplorable to think of the figure Christopher must cut in the eyes of those whose robust taste demands in a young man some more potent and heroic qualities, a gentlemanly hardihood in language and liquor, an interesting suggestion of moral obliquity, or, at least, some hereditary vice on which the character may make ship wreck with magnificent helplessness. Christopher with his preference for his sister's society, and his lack of interest in the majority of manly occupations, from hunting to music halls has small claim to respect or admiration. (80)

Late in the novel, as he muses over a lost ideal, the narrator echoes Francie in explaining that "Christopher, fortunately or unfortunately for him, was not like other men" (286).

Although Christopher Dysart may appear "deplorable" to the men in the novel, the women seem to understand him. Early on, Lady Dysart has complained about her son's behavior and his resistance to marriage. "'It is most disheartening; I ask nice girls to the house, but I might just as well ask nice boys--Oh, of course, yes--' in answer to a protest from her daughter; 'he talks to them, but you know quite well what I mean'" (48). As frequently occurs in Somerville and Ross, the narrator is vague, and the reader must supply the precise meaning. In this case, there is the added irony that Pamela clearly understands Lady Dysart's meaning; and, furthermore, she understands her brother's behavior since it closely mirrors her own. When Dysart is tempted into a proposal of marriage, he is drawn towards a marriage that is unrealistic

both in the world of The Real Charlotte and in the world it represents. Francie refuses him, interpreting his proposal as the paternalistic pity of a superior; furthermore, she is still in love with Hawkins. When her lover's photograph drops to the floor, Dysart hurriedly leaves, erasing his previous words. Francie is probably right in doubting the validity of Dysart's love. She has probably never been convinced by his vague proposal since in an earlier episode she said to Charlotte, "'but I don't think he'll ever want to marry anyone'" (158). Francie realizes that Dysart has no desire.

Dysart, however, is not simply "unmanly," he also exemplifies what society regards as "feminine" qualities. Francie finds him unaggressive in his relationship with her; she comments on his "tenderness." His "feminine" characteristics keep reemerging. On several occasions, he blushes like a girl; in one particular incident, Lambert finds him helping Francie with her sewing. "Christopher reddened a little as he looked round. 'I'm afraid I can't shake hands with you, Lambert,' he said with an avoidably foolish laugh, 'I'm dressmaking'" (180). In one of Dysart's last appearances, Captain Cursiter sees him standing with Charlotte Mullen "on the turf quay, one short, black and powerful, the other tall, white, and passive" (314). Once again, in this situation, "masculine" and "feminine"

attributes have been reversed. Finally, in a brief but telling scene where he approaches Lambert regarding his agent's fraud, Dysart's gender is compromised and takes precedence over class issues: "Little as he liked Lambert, he sided with him now with something more than a man's ordinary resentment against feminine espionage upon another man" (313). Dysart's decision to side with Lambert is certainly an example of the homosocial desire characteristic of the patriarchy.<sup>5</sup>

But, of course, Dysart is male, and, in certain situations in the novel, situations in which his class role takes precedence over his gender role, Dysart is capable of asserting his essential authoritarian, male position as a member of the upper class. Despite his class position, however, throughout the novel, the narrator stresses Dysart's incapacity for action, a certain "mental uncertainty" (15). Even after his father's death when he has inherited title, land, and responsibility, we are told "[h]is want of initiative energy in everyday matters kept him motionless and apathetic" (284). Early on, the narrator describes him from the viewpoint of his own class, his mother's Anglo-Irish friends: "One of his most exasperating points was that he could not be referred to any known type. He was 'between the sizes', as shopmen say of gloves" (45). This hybrid quality is certainly characteristic of Christopher Dysart, as has

been shown so far in this study, but it is present only as it relates to the representation of gender. In The Real Charlotte, contradictions of character in the Anglo-Irish gentry relate to gender only and rarely infect or subvert class position. Contradictions resulting from Anglo-Irish characters being infected or subverted by crossing, or rather attempting to cross, not gender, but class and religious boundaries will become increasingly persistent only in Mount Music, An Enthusiast, and The Big House of Inver.

### **The Subjectivity of Class Perspectives**

In matters dealing with class, Christopher Dysart is perhaps "typical," and it may seem as if the authors are treating him somewhat indulgently. In a novel without heroes, for example, Dysart is allowed the one heroic act. As appropriate for an officer of the Empire, Dysart saves Francie from drowning in a boating accident; thus he provides a sharp contrast to his cowardly agent, Lambert, who clutches at Francie to save himself. At the end of the novel, Dysart acts liberally and generously towards Lambert, reinstating him as his agent despite Lambert's dishonesty; Francie praises his "goodness." Many critics (Fallis, Hall, Deane, Weekes) have condemned Somerville and Ross's sympathy and generosity towards the Dysarts and the Anglo-Irish. Although Ann Owens Weekes presents the only feminist interpretation of

the novel as yet, her reading of Somerville and Ross on issues of class, race and religion are sometimes inaccurate.<sup>6</sup> She also suggests that the narrator possesses a "patronizing colonial voice" and concludes that "the class and gender system is revealed almost against the will of the narrators, who never fully condemn it" (61).

Certainly, though The Real Charlotte condemns the restrictive gender system of the patriarchy, the authors' attitude towards the class system is far more problematic. Somerville and Ross were critical of their own class; they understood the vast "chasms" that separated the different classes and the difficulties, indeed the tragedies, that this caused, but although they challenged the patriarchal gender system in their writings and in their lives, they certainly never explicitly questioned the existence or necessity of class. When class intersects with gender, the injustices of the system are objectively represented, but when class issues conflict with economic interests (which support the class system), particularly the ownership of land, objectivity clearly erodes. The narrative stance may certainly be biased at times, but it is not "heedless to or apparently unaware of human suffering," as Weekes argues. What Weekes has failed to point out is that a character's class is most frequently represented from another character's viewpoint so that one class is represented from the "biased," class perspective of

another class since there are no classless or totally objective characters, narrators, or authors. Furthermore, in The Real Charlotte, class is also often represented as an innate characteristic, an aspect of one's personality. Therefore, the reader most frequently views Francie from the Dysarts' perspective, a perspective which is gently satirized by the narrator. In presenting the Dysarts' view of Francie, Somerville and Ross often satirize their own class viewpoint. Because they lived in the contact zone as women of the gentry who were in close touch with their tenants, because they were women who were still dominated by their mothers and who had little autonomy or control over their lives, because they were members of a class who were losing their political and economic power, and because they were realist writers, they were able to view the world from a double perspective. The difficulty, however, occurs when the Dysarts are viewed from Francie's class perspective. While the narrator understands all too well the tyranny of gender and understands Francie's situation as a single woman, the narrator may not always fully understand Francie's situation as a lower-middle-class woman, nor can the narrator accurately view the gentry from a lower-middle-class perspective even though Martin Ross experienced that life as a child in Dublin.

Although they came from very different worlds, Francie and Christopher Dysart, ironically, share an understanding of



that social hierarchy, and they express that knowledge as no other characters in the novel do. On their first meeting, Dysart thinks of the vast chasm that separates them, and, later, Pamela accuses him of studying "her through a telescope" (117) as a foreign object. Francie, arriving in Bruff, remarks: "'You know," she went on, 'I've never stayed in a house like this before. I mean -- you're all so different -'" (143). Dysart is immediately prejudiced against Francie for the very fact that she is Charlotte Mullen's niece, "an unexplainable sequence of thought made him suddenly decide that her niece was as second-rate as might have been expected" (51), and all the Dysarts repeatedly remark on her "vulgarity." Yet, at the same time, her "vulgarity" is different and, therefore, strangely attractive: "'How young she was, and how pretty, and how inexpressibly vulgar!'" (53). Pamela Dysart feels she needs to apologize to admit liking her. In thus representing Francie, the narrator reveals more about the Dysarts than about Francie. When Dysart begins to spend more time with Francie, the narrator gives one of many insights into his thoughts: "He said to himself, as he smoked a final cigarette, that she must be a nice girl somehow not to have been more vulgar than she was, and she really must have a soul to be saved." Clearly, this is not the narrator's opinion of Francie, but Dysart's; thus the narrator ironically reveals and mocks

Dysart's class stance, his condescension, and his self-importance.

In a long self-reflexive passage where the Dysarts begin to realize that Charlotte Mullen wants Christopher to marry her niece, it becomes more difficult to separate the viewpoints of the omniscient narrator and Dysart himself; but, again, irony is at play, and the reader is aware that these are Dysart's thoughts. He sees himself as desirable: "He was being chased. Now that he knew it he wondered how he could have been unaware of it" (208). Another long paragraph begins with a sentence including "he said to himself"; however, by the end of the paragraph, Dysart's and the narrator's viewpoint seem to have merged and could easily be confused. "He had idealized her to the pitch that might have been expected, and clothed her with his own refinement, as with a garment" (209). This is a difficult passage, one which cannot be taken ironically and which undoubtedly illuminates the narrator's class values, particularly with the use of "refinement." Yet, in the writings of Somerville and Ross, one often wonders whether there is not a hint of mockery, as in this representation of Dysart's love. If the narrator has represented Francie as a "vulgar" flirt, then it is arguable that Dysart's idealized love is all the more ridiculous.

Towards the end of the novel, when Dysart shocks his mother with the revelation that Francie has refused his proposal, there is no mistaking the different viewpoints that exist in the Dysart family. Lady Dysart makes her class position and her attitude towards Francie abundantly plain: "'I call her a thorough adventuress!' she continued. 'She came down here, determined to marry some one, and as Mr. Hawkins escaped from her, she just snatched at the next man she could find'" (318). Ironically again, Lady Dysart does not realize that in her anger she has marginalized her son by identifying him as simply "the next man." Dysart enlightens her to the truth of his offer. "'This great honour was offered to her,' he went on, taking refuge in lame satire, 'last August, unstimulated by any attempts at suicide on her part, and she refused it.'" In this instance, the viewpoints of narrator and character coincide, and Dysart has been allowed to redeem himself by virtue of his honesty and self-deprecation.

Although the narrator also refers patronizingly to "Francie's ingenuous, unaffected vulgarity" as though it were the objective truth, the most "class conscious" remarks come not from the Dysarts or from the narrator, but from the Dysarts' head servant, Gorman:

Dinner was over. Gorman was regaling his fellows in the servants hall with an account of how Miss Fitzpatrick had eaten her curry with a knife and fork, and her

Scotch woodcock with a spoon, and how she had accepted every variety of wine that he had offered her, and taken only a mouthful of each, an eccentricity of which William was even now reaping the benefit in the pantry. (236)

That such obviously petty and mean-spirited observations should be uttered by the servants might perhaps indicate that the authors had observed, perhaps ironically, the class-consciousness of the lower-classes. But this passage also demonstrates how the servants had absorbed the snobbery of the gentry, the snobbery with which the authors have so often been associated. Has Gorman overheard Lady Dysart and Pamela discussing Francie in such a way? Does the narrator recoil from attributing such tasteless remarks to Lady Dysart, and, therefore, does the narrator transfer them to her servants? Thus the reading of the text is once again indeterminate. This passage is certainly more critical of Gorman than it is of Francie; it is certainly a critique of the Dysarts and their household as it is also a critique of the Anglo-Irish hegemony. Whatever this passage tells us about class representation in The Real Charlotte, the passage is authentic; we can hear Gorman belittling Francie.

Throughout the novel, Francie breaks the rules of society; finally it is this rule-breaking that kills her. The paragraph that describes her fatal riding accident begins, "Francie, heedless of the etiquette that required that she and Hawkins should stop their horses till the

funeral passed, struck the mare" (338). Francie is "heedless" of society and its values. The reader must decide who is at fault. V.S. Pritchett argues that Francie's death "is due to the profound snobbery of the authors" (608); however, Somerville has stated of Francie in Irish Memories, "We knew her best; we were fondest of her" (229). Of her death, she writes, "It felt like killing a wild bird that had trusted itself to you" (231). Already prior to 1917, Somerville and Ross had been criticized for Francie's death, but Somerville insists that they were right in their decision. As Thomas Flanagan has pointed out, The Real Charlotte is "a singularly unsentimental book" (62). Being realists and representing society as they knew it, Somerville and Ross could not find a place for Francie in the harsh, class-ridden world of their novel which they knew would never accommodate her.

Although we can refer to many instances where Francie is being directly criticized by the Dysarts, no direct criticism of the Dysarts by lower-class characters exists besides the narrator's irony, itself an indirect form of criticism and satire. Certainly the narrational stance betrays awareness of the intimidating effects of the Big House on Francie who "studied the dark and unintelligible oil-paintings on the expanses of wall, the flowers, arranged with such easy and careless lavishness in strange and innumerable jars and vases" (120). The Big House is an alien world for Francie

that at first she cannot decipher, but it is not one which she is allowed to critique. Bruff is a world which presents a stark contrast to Francie's later home at her uncle's "Albatross Villa, the crowded, carpetless house" (238). The Big House affects her in the way it was intended to do; it is an intimidating environment that momentarily overpowers her and diminishes her self-confidence even further so that the usually ebullient Francie becomes almost unrecognizable: "She stood forlornly in the big cool hall . . .uncertain of all things except her own ignorance" (118). She becomes painfully aware of the garishness of her attire, a mark of her class position: "She felt as if her petticoats showed boots more than was desirable, that her gloves were of too brilliant a tint, and that she ought to have left her umbrella in the hall" (120). The narrator's description of Francie's feeling of discomfort and inadequacy is not without sympathy; but the balance is quickly retrieved: Bruff's humanity is restored by Pamela's arrival so that Francie becomes "gradually aware that she was in an atmosphere of ease and friendliness" (121).

While the Dysarts' snobbish disapproval of Francie seems accurate and realistic, the narrator seems to have some difficulty in representing Francie's view of the Dysarts, and her reactions to them do not always seem quite exact or even plausible. For example, in the same difficult passage which

was noted before in which Dysart "idealized" Francie, there is a passage where the narrator, and on this occasion there is no doubt as to the voice, examines Francie's view of Dysart.

Some dim understanding of him must have reached Francie, with her ignorant sentimentalities and her Dublin brogue; and as a sea-weed stretches vague arms up towards the light through the conflict of the tides, her pliant soul rose through its inherited vulgarities, and gained some vision of higher things. (209)

Francie's spiritual experience seems so exaggerated here that one wonders whether the authors are being ironic. Are Francie and Dysart being represented from the narrator's upper-class position? Certainly, unless it be read slightly ironically, this passage exemplifies Weekes' assertion that Francie's vulgarity has "stunted her moral development" (80). This passage in the novel also refers back to the theme of Dysart's moral and social superiority, so that, in effect, he becomes once again her savior. Again, the narrator stresses the distance that exists between them: "Christopher remained infinitely remote."

However, despite being condemned by her class position and by her apparent representation as Dysart's moral inferior, Francie is saved by her Irishness. Left alone by Lambert at Rosemount with Charlotte Mullen as her chaperon, Francie is tempted to begin a liaison with Hawkins, but the narrator informs us: "Her emotional Irish nature, with all

its frivolity and recklessness, had also, far down in it, an Irish girl's moral principle and purity" (321). This reference to a quality that the narrator believes to be essentially "Irish" is an element in Somerville and Ross's writing that appears only briefly in the Francie's representation, but it is an element that will reappear in Charlotte Mullen and, to a far greater degree, in later novels. Although it may be read as a stereotype, whenever the word "Irish" appears, it always retains positive connotations. Significantly, this passage, unlike so many others, contains no hint of irony because, immediately following this statement, the reader sees Francie struggling to act with "moral principle"; she makes every effort to avoid Hawkins although the narrator tells us that "[e]verything was against her." When Francie acts as an "Irish girl," she does not need Dysart as her savior. Her Irishness is an essential quality and is not infected by class.

Although we have seen that characters such as Dysart, Pamela, and Francie subvert the patriarchy and the status quo in their relationship to marriage, the issue of class appears problematic, and it might be argued that Somerville and Ross only permit their class to be criticized indirectly through irony or through the self-criticism of the class itself and not by others. There are a few occasions, however, when the



narrator or the events in the plot are directly critical of the authority of the patriarchy and the class system. One striking example occurs when the narrator describes Dysart's inability to imagine Francie's situation. Unlike Somerville and Ross, Dysart is unable even to attempt to view the world from any position except that of isolated privilege. Ironically, the narrator's criticism of Dysart sounds very similar to much of the criticism directed towards the authors themselves as outsiders. In a passage where Dysart learns "with a kind of horror" of Francie's marriage to Lambert, the narrator states:

He knew nothing of the tyranny of circumstances. To prosperous young men like Christopher, poverty, except barefooted and in rags, is a name, and unpaid bills a joke. That Albatross Villa could have driven her to the tremendous surrender of marriage was a thing incredible. All that was left for him to believe was that he had been mistaken, and that the lucent quality that he thought he had found in her soul had existed only in his imagination. (285-86)

This is a significant passage because it condemns Christopher Dysart and the landed-gentry class for not being able to understand and translate the experiences of another class. Dysart knows only the immediate poverty that he sees in rural Ireland, but he knows nothing of grinding lower-middle-class poverty such as Francie experiences with her relatives in Bray in Albatross Villa and that Martin Ross experienced with her mother in north Dublin after the death of her father.

Somerville and Ross are class conscious; they do see the differences between the classes; they are amused by affectation in all classes, but clearly, as in this passage, they can begin to imagine the differences between the classes with some sympathy, to translate the experience of another class, and to condemn their own for not being able to do so, particularly for not being able to accommodate the outsider. The narrator is not immune to suffering. In this passage, the narrator criticizes Dysart for his lack of awareness, his immunity to Francie's circumstance, for seeing but not knowing. In later novels, Somerville and Ross will condemn the gentry for knowing but not changing. Although they themselves were of the gentry class, as suffragists who were in contact with women of other classes, they had begun to understand Francie as a single woman and to understand the economic pressures that forced her into marriage and which prevented her from resisting the patriarchy.

Another woman, Julia Duffy, also becomes the casualty of Dysart's insensitivity and ignorance of others' situations, but this time his misreading of another has tragic consequences. A long-standing tenant of the Dysart estates, Julia Duffy, has just been ejected from Bruff by Christopher's autocratic father. She had gone to complain to Sir Benjamin that his agent, Roddy Lambert, has been "pairsecuting" her in order to make her leave the farm that she and her family have

leased for several generations. She tells Sir Benjamin, "I am certain that it is by no wish of yours, or of your kind and honorable son, Mr. Christopher, that your agent is pairsecuting me to make me leave the farm" (194). Sir Benjamin's dislike, jealousy, and suspicion of his son is such that, although Julia flatters him, he redirects his anger towards her and has her thrown off his estate. Perhaps, he recalls that she once briefly contacted the Land League for support. Once again, the irony in this passage derives from the fact that this autocratic act directs the landlord's anger and suspicion towards his own heir rather than towards his tenant. It is his son, and not his tenants, whom he suspects of rebellion. We have been told how much the tenants rejoiced at the transference of the estate's management to Christopher following his father's illness, yet it is Julia, the female tenant, who becomes the victim in the power struggle between father and son. When Julia Duffy arrives at Tally Ho Lodge, she meets Christopher Dysart and recounts her ordeal with his father. Like his father, however, Christopher misreads Duffy, "eyeing her with natural disfavour" and believing that she is drunk, he dismisses her curtly, "'you may be sure that no injustice will be done to you--'" (197). Of course, injustice is done; Miss Duffy loses her estate and ends her days in the lunatic asylum. Despite being unlike other men, and despite subverting the

patriarchy, Christopher certainly appears to be fulfilling his father's role.

### **Irish Women and the Uncertainty of Class**

Although a minor character in The Real Charlotte, Julia Duffy is an important key to understanding the representation of gender, class, and race in this novel. She shares many of Charlotte Mullen's circumstances although she has a different personality from the novel's main protagonist. Like Charlotte, Julia is a single woman, not by choice but by fate. In the representation of these two women, Julia Duffy and Charlotte Mullen, Somerville and Ross demonstrate their understanding of the situation of single Irish women, particularly Irish women from the peasant and middle classes who have no large dowries; women who, in the marketplace of the patriarchy, have only two commodities to offer: their physical beauty or their labor. In describing Julia Duffy's situation, the authors clearly explain her predicament: "Marriage had not been forthcoming; in her father's time the necessary dowry had not been forthcoming, and even her ownership of the farm was not enough to counterbalance her ill-looks and her pagan habits" (37). The narrator had just explained that Julia frequented neither church nor chapel.

Somerville and Ross's brief explanation of Julia Duffy's celibacy reflects the situation of many peasant women in

their novels and closely matches the studies of such well-known demographers and sociologists as K. H. Connell and Arensberg and Kimbell. In "Peasant Marriage in Ireland: its Structure and Development since the Famine," Connell points out that Ireland was unique in its large proportion of "life-long bachelors and spinsters" (502). According to Arensberg and Kimbell, the particularly high numbers of celibates were to be found amongst the small farmers, and especially in the west of Ireland. Connell explains this situation: "Marriage gratified only incidentally a couple's sexuality, their desire for companionship or for children" (503)--exactly paralleling Martin Ross's description of peasant marriage--and that marriage took place only when "the land needed a woman" (503). Because women were needed to work on the farm, "what was wanted was 'a good, hard-working stump of a girl,'" (504); but women also needed to have a sizable dowry of about £200. Connell notes that "in the 1880's Cork farmers paying rents of £30 or £40 a year were said to give their daughters dowries of three or four hundred pounds" (504). After the famine, however, with the marked change from tillage to livestock, J. J. Lee notes, in "Women and the Church Since the Famine," that "women were now less necessary about the farm" (37), a change which further weakened a woman's economic independence and "made her much more vulnerable to male economic dominance." This change in women's status, Lee

explains, made the dowry even more important, and, in turn, daughters became even more dependent on their fathers to secure a marriage for them. Of course, Connell, as well as Arensberg and Kimbell, notes that many young women left their homes or emigrated to England or to America to earn their dowries. Connell further points out that "the pretty girls may make do with a smaller fortune" (505). All these studies agree that, in rural Ireland, the ownership and inheritance of land is always a prerequisite to marriage.

Julia Duffy, then, is a single woman, not by choice, it would appear, but as a result of circumstances: the lack of both a sufficiently large dowry and good looks. She is a pathetic, almost tragic, figure as she struggles against poverty, illness and insanity to preserve the last remnants of respectability. She loses her battle to retain the twenty-acre farm and house, Gurthnamuckla, that she has inherited from her father and grandfather. She is defeated by the prevailing economic depression, the bankruptcy of her grazier tenant, the schemes of the land agent, Roddy Lambert, the ignorance of her landlord, and the treachery of Charlotte Mullen. There is practically no irony or humor in this representation of a single Irish woman. As a result of her failing circumstances, Julia's class is hard to determine. She lives in a squalid house whose rotting timbers are shrouded in cobwebs and whose broken window panes are stuffed

with rags. Her kitchen, where she prepares her meager diet of gruel, potatoes, and greasy cabbage, is open to hens and turkeys; her house is bare of furniture except for a broken bedstead; she herself appears to Francie "both in feature and costume, as a beggar woman who frequented Sackville Street" (40).

Julia Duffy is the daughter of a "mixed marriage," mixed in terms of race, religion, and class. The narrator explains that her father "had been a hard-drinking Protestant farmer, who had married his own dairy woman, a Roman Catholic, dirty, thriftless" and who "had so disintegrated himself with whiskey that his body and soul fell asunder" (37). Having sunk into such circumstances where "[e]verything spoke of bygone plenty and present wretchedness" (188), Julia Duffy lives in the past. The change in Julia's present material circumstances are therefore reflected in the change in her racial, religious, and class affiliation. She no longer associates with the Protestant middle-class. In fact, we are told that she "was a woman of few friends." Her only associates now are her mother's relatives, Norry the Boat, Charlotte's servant, and the people who come to her for cures. When she goes to Tally Ho Lodge, she goes to the back door. As a result of her poverty, Julia becomes far more closely associated with the native Irish tradition on her mother's side than with the Anglo-Irish tradition. She is

visually represented as a poor, native Irish woman. She wears a shawl on her head, "a stained and torn black skirt" and a "frayed red Galway petticoat"; she goes barefoot because we are told that "her feet had recently been thrust into boots" (39). Her hair is matted "with the turf ashes of many sluttish days." Julia is also a sick woman. Her diet, as noted above, is the diet of the impoverished native Irish, and she has also become proficient in the use of native, herbal remedies; hence, the earlier reference to "her pagan habits" (37). When Charlotte Mullen walks into Julia's kitchen, she discovers that "three old women were squatted on the floor in front of the fire, smoking short clay pipes, and holding converse in Irish" (59). In her house, Irish is spoken, and she has been supported by the Land League.

From these images, it is hard to recognize the "aristocratic" roots of Julia's family. Julia is far from aristocratic unless the narrator is confusing race with class and using "aristocratic" to denote Julia's Anglo-Irish lineage. It would appear that despite her Protestant ancestry Julia is represented as having sunk back into the condition of a poor, native Irish woman perhaps as the result of her parents' racially "mixed marriage." As Theodore Allen has pointed out, during the eighteenth century, the native Irish were considered as racially inferior by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy so that racially mixed marriages were proscribed.



Another symptom of her parents' mixed marriage is Julia's insanity. Julia ends her days in an insane asylum. However, Julia's insanity is never analyzed, and, in a novel which focuses on the condition of single women within the patriarchy, this insanity must be viewed not simply as the consequence of a mixed marriage but also in the context of Julia's increasing poverty, isolation, oppression, and victimization by Charlotte Mullen and the Dysarts.

Because race and religion have been so closely interconnected since the time of the penal laws, Julia's religious affiliations are also mixed. What follows is an explanation of Julia's religious allegiance, or the lack of it, and the following passage shows very clearly how closely class, religion, and race are intertwined in the Irish context:

Julia had always been wont to go to Lismoyle church with her father, not so much as a matter of religious as of social conviction. All the best bonnets in the town went to the parish church, and to a woman of Julia's stamp, whose poor relations wear hoods and shawls over their heads and go to chapel, there is no salvation out of a bonnet. After old John Duffy's death, however, bonnets and the aristocratic way of salvation seemed altogether to rise out of his daughter's scope. Chapel she despised with all the fervour of an Irish Protestant, but if the farm was to be kept and the rent paid, there was no money to spare for bonnets. Therefore Julia, in defiance of the entreaties of her mother's priest and her own parson, would have nothing to do with either chapel or church, and stayed sombrely at home.  
(37)

In the very first line, the narrator makes it clear that Julia is Protestant but that her religious preference is

influenced by class and race affiliation rather than by dogma or doctrine. She identifies with her father's class, not her mother's (although her mother's relatives are her most frequent associates); and, therefore, she is Protestant, not Catholic. Class is the motivating factor in her choice of religion. In nineteenth-century Ireland, Protestantism generally identified one as being middle-, or upper-class, or Anglo-Irish, hence the use of the metonymy "bonnet"; Roman Catholicism identified one as probably being lower-class and native Irish, being without the means to purchase a "bonnet," (although there are always exceptions), hence the reference to the traditional native Irish dress of hoods and shawls. The narrator ironically describes this association of religion with class and with race, and literally translates Protestantism as "the aristocratic way of salvation," again making it clear that religious preference, in Julia's case, is supported by class. The irony, of course, is that Julia hardly reflects the aristocratic way of life. Julia's abhorrence of Catholicism does not derive from religious intolerance but from class consciousness. In England, religious affiliation is also often determined by class, but class antagonism is never expressed in religious terms. In the Irish context, however, class antagonism becomes expressed in religious and, by association, racial terms. Moreover, Julia's class identity, like her racial and

religious identity, is as unstable as Christopher Dysart's gender identity.

Julia, a totally helpless and passive figure, is undeniably a victim of Charlotte Mullen, the main protagonist of the novel. Yet Julia and Charlotte share much in common. They are both single women who have failed to marry because of their "fate," want of beauty and money, those vital commodities in the marriage market.<sup>3</sup> They originate from the same class; Julia's "grandfather was all but a gentleman" (39), drank port wine, and hunted with Charlotte's grandfather. There are, however, considerable differences between the two women. As Julia has "sunk," Charlotte has "risen" (62) in the ranks of Lismoyle society. While we know nothing of Julia's inner life, since her representation focuses on her ability to survive physically, to stay alive, the complexity of Charlotte's character is revealed throughout the course of the novel. Charlotte Mullen is a "tragic" (Cahalan 94) figure "who attains a certain worth by virtue of a deeper life than her enemies can possess or imagine" (Flanagan 62). She is both admirable for her energy, control, and strength of will, yet despicable for her ruthless and shameless ambition which will sacrifice everyone and everything in its course. Although Charlotte tends towards the middle class by virtue of her grandfather's tastes, her parents' occupations, and her own aspirations,

embodying the spirit of materialism and free enterprise of the middle class, she also possesses traits of the Irish peasantry. Guy Fehlmann admits that it is difficult to define the nineteenth-century Irish "bourgeoisie," but he states that even before the end of the nineteenth century "il y avait eu des gens dont la situation était intermédiaire entre celles du peuple et de l'aristocratie" (263). Charlotte, however, is also on easy terms with the landed gentry of Lismoyle; she is indeed an "amphibious thing" (259) whose class and gender representations are the most unstable in the novel<sup>12</sup> and whose "amphibious" nature will allow her to triumph in the struggle for power and the acquisition of land.

Charlotte's class representation, like that of Julia Duffy's, is not clearly defined, so that its ambiguity reflects the social upheavals of the period immediately following the Land Wars that provide the historical setting for the novel. Charlotte's father was the Dysart's land agent before the days of the Land Wars when land was worth twice its present value (295). Her mother "was reported to have been a national schoolmistress and her grandmother a barefooted country girl" (12). Like Julia Duffy's mother, Charlotte's mother is not referred to again, but Charlotte, in conversation with Christopher Dysart, is at pains to point out that her father's brothers, the doctor and the lawyer,

both married Butlers (a well-known Huguenot name), and that it is through this branch of the family, the Butlers and the Mullens, not the Fitzpatricks, that she and Francie are related. In the affected manner which she always assumes in Dysart's company, Charlotte adds, "'People laugh at me, and say I'm mad about family and pedigree . . . there's nothing like good blood after all'" (83). She does not hesitate to inform him that "'the Butlers of Tally Ho were as well known in their time as the Dysarts of Bruff!'" (82). Lambert too remarks that Charlotte was "'a nailer at pedigrees'" (14).

Although Charlotte is often referred to by other characters as "vulgar" and "disgusting," these epithets seem to refer rather to her physical appearance and character than to her actual class position; yet as we have noted before, at this point in their development the authors do seem to regard class as a set of inherited or innate characteristics. Lady Dysart likes her because she is "never dull" and because she is a "woman who could talk to her on spiritualism, or books, or any current topic" (12). In fact, on several occasions there are references to Charlotte's reading habits. Dysart admits that "'if anyone could understand the land Act I believe it would be you'" (16), and the narrator informs us that "[s]he was a great and insatiable reader, surprisingly well acquainted with the classics of literature, and unexpectedly lavish in the purchase of books" (21); furthermore,

she reads the English Times, The Saturday Review, and many French novels. These are not the tastes of a middle-class philistine nor of a vulgar "paudeen."

Despite her literary tastes, her acceptance at Bruff, and her mercantile ethos, Charlotte also displays characteristics of the Irish peasant: "She had the Irish peasant woman's love of heavy clothing and dislike of abating any item of it in summer" (173-4). In common with her impoverished, low-class tenants of Ferry Row, she is "equipped with the absolutely accurate business memory of the Irish peasant" (58), and again "[t]here was a strain of superstition in her that, like her love of land, showed how strongly the blood of the Irish peasant ran in her veins" (260). In the very last scene of the novel, Charlotte, her skirt pinned up, is situated repairing the airless potato loft of Gurthnamuckla, which the narrator has almost transformed into a potato patch, with all its historical connotations: "The loft was hot and airless, redolent of the cowhouse below, as well as of the clayey mustiness of the potatoes that were sending pallid, worm-like roots down into space through the cracks in the boards" (339). No more obvious representation of Charlotte as a peasant laborer exists in the novel, yet the next sentence begins ironically, "Miss Mullen," once again stressing the instability of her class identity. Charlotte also knows Irish well, a fact

"that always came as a shock to those who were uncertain as to its limitations" (281). In her transactions with the Ferry Row tenants, the old women in Julia Duffy's kitchen, the butcher or the tailor, she is, seemingly, as relaxed as she is at a tennis party in the grounds of Bruff House.

Charlotte does not truly belong to any particular group. Being a single woman, her ability to support herself is extremely limited although she has inherited money from her aunt--money that should have gone to Francie. As a young woman she had assisted her father, the Dysart's land agent, but on his death, Roddy Lambert inherited this position. Her uncles were lawyers and doctors, and throughout the novel there are many references to Charlotte's medical skills and to her hands, the symbol of healing. Charlotte is both healer and destroyer. In addition, her intellectual acumen is often cited; Dysart comments on her knowledge of the Land Act; Lambert admits she is "intellectually his master" (296); and, in the scene where she suggests Duffy's eviction, the narrator states that one could discern "the spirit of her attorney grandfather gleaming in her eyes" (174). But, of course, in this place and time, no opportunities existed for women to become doctors or lawyers, certainly not women of Charlotte's class. Rejected in marriage, unable to enter the professions or to acquire her father's position, Charlotte becomes a slum landlord, a money lender, and, finally,

a land owner. In order to survive as a single woman, Charlotte has adopted the ruthless individualist spirit of emergent capitalism in Ireland which in the countryside expressed itself in the drive for the possession of land.<sup>22</sup> In her overriding desire to become a landowner, she cheats Francie of her inheritance, causes Julia Duffy to be evicted from her home, and betrays her former love and her father's successor, Roddy Lambert. Despite "being mad about family," Charlotte knows no loyalty to blood, gender, or class.

### **Class and Dialect**

Somerville and Ross have often been praised for their knowledge and skill in realistically representing Anglo-Irish dialect or, as it is called by linguists, Hiberno-English dialect. In his study of The Irish Novel, Cahalan notes that "as writers of masterfully accurate and effective rural Irish dialogue, Somerville and Ross were predecessors of Lady Gregory and Synge" (91), and, together with Anthony Cronin, he quotes Patrick Kavanagh as saying "that Somerville and Ross had a better ear for Irish dialogue than anybody except Joyce" (Cronin 82). Yet no attempt has been made to analyze the authors' use of Anglo-Irish dialect. The most detailed reference appears to be a two-page analysis by John Garvin in "The Anglo-Irish Idiom in the Works of Major Irish Writers." Here Garvin states that Somerville and Ross were "the first



to use the Anglo-Irish idiom artistically. . . . Before them Irish popular speech in literature was simply the brogue represented by misspelt words intended to reproduce the mispronunciation of standard English by derisory specimens of a lesser breed" (103).

In The Real Charlotte, Somerville and Ross employ a whole continuum of regional and social Anglo-Irish dialects differing in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. The varieties along the continuum include Standard English as spoken by the Dysarts and other English and Anglo-Irish upper-class characters and the Anglo-Irish dialect as spoken by the middle- and lower-classes.<sup>13</sup> Within this large and socially diverse group, Somerville and Ross employ a wide continuum of language and dialects to delineate subtle differences of class and personality, problematizing language as a marker of social identity.<sup>14</sup> Within this group of middle-class speakers falls Julia Duffy. Like other middle-class characters in the novel, such as Lucy and Roddy Lambert and Charlotte Mullen, Julia Duffy's language is primarily standard, except when she is distraught. Lucy Lambert's standard syntax also rapidly changes to Anglo-Irish syntax when Charlotte Mullen insinuates that Roddy Lambert may have been unfaithful.<sup>15</sup> "'Is it me own dear husband that you say such things of?'" and "'Is it look at Roddy's letters?'" (203). Julia Duffy, however, speaks in "the carefully

genteel voice that she clung to in the wreck of her fortunes" (39); affectation is implied. "Lady" is pronounced "leedy" (39), "father" pronounced "fawther" (190), and she incorrectly uses the French, *deshabillee*, "in dishabilly" (40) as an ironic, half-hearted apology for her negligent and ragged appearance when she is visited by Lambert and Francie. Julia Duffy's idiolect is clearly different from the Dysarts', for example; yet it is not a lower-class dialect. Its complexity reflects her own ambiguous class status. Some elements of pronunciation, grammar, and syntax are clearly Anglo-Irish, but, along the dialect continuum, her dialect is far more standard than her mother's relative, Norry the Boat. This is very clear when one hears their dialogue:

'And is it to legit from Gurthnamuckla ye done?' said Norry, when the first greetings had been exchanged, and Julia was seated in the kitchen, 'and you looking as white as the dhrivelling snow this minit.'

'I did,' said Julia feebly, 'and I'd be thankful to you for a drink of water. The day's very close.'

'Faith, ye'll get no wather in this house,' returned Norry in grim hospitality: 'I'll give ye a sup of milk, or would it be too much delay on ye to wait till I bile a kittel for a cup o' tay? Bad Cess to Bid Sal! There isn't as much hot wather in the house this minute as'd write yer name.'

'I'm obliged to ye, Norry,' said Julia stiffly, her sick pride evolving a supposition that she could be in want of food; 'but I'm only after my breakfast myself. Indeed,' she added assuming from old habit her usual attitude of medical adviser, 'you'd be the better yourself for taking less tea.' (189)

Julia's "after" and "water" retain their standard pronunciation here as contrasted with Norry's "wather," but

she does use some Irish syntactical constructions such as "I'm only after my breakfast" and "you'd be better yourself for taking less tea." She also uses the reflexive pronoun, "myself" and "yourself," and inserts the definite article before "better" where Standard English would not. Although there are a number of Anglo-Irish features in her speech, the pronunciation and syntax are far closer to Standard English than her cousin Norry's. In conversation with Sir Benjamin, Julia's language is completely standard in pronunciation and syntax. Later that day, however, fearing eviction from Gurthnamuckla, Julia lapses into Anglo-Irish dialect both in the pronunciation and syntax, and, during her interview with Christopher Dysart, her language becomes far less standard.

'Where's Charlotte Mullen, till I tell her to her face that I know her plots and her thricks! 'Tis to say that to her I came here, and to tell her 'twas she lent money to Peter Joyce that was grazing my farm, and refused it to him secondly, the way he'd go bankrupt on me, and she's to have my farm and my house that my grandfather built, thinking to even herself with rest of the gentry.' (198)

This is not the language of an aristocrat, at least not an Anglo-Irish aristocrat as Julia believes herself to be, but its tortuous syntax and accumulated coordination is wonderfully expressive of Julia Duffy's state of mind. While she thinks of herself as an aristocrat but endures the poverty of a landless peasant in her efforts to hold on to her twenty acres in the face of eviction, Julia represents

the desperate attempts of the small farmer trying to hold on to her land against the onslaught of the land grabbers. Thus Julia, a proud, lonely, independent, single woman, "at once a landless peasant and ruined aristocrat" (Kiberd 79) represents the fate of the rural Ireland. One of the final images of Julia Duffy is of her walking along the road to Lismoyle "as possibly a man might who was walking out to be shot" (195).

Charlotte's ability to interact with people of all classes is perhaps most clearly represented by her ability to change her speech or dialect at will depending on her environment. Her peasant roots as well as her derisive attitude are evident in the colorful metaphors she uses in the company of people she considers her social inferiors. She reproves Julia Duffy for not attending Church and warns her against converting to Catholicism: "'There's plenty in Lismoyle would be sorry to see your father's daughter die with the wafer in her mouth!'" (63). In conversation with Francie regarding Miss Hope-Drummond's chances of marrying Dysart, she says, "'She'll not get him, not if she was to put her eyes on sticks!'" (158). In conversation with the Lamberts she uses such expressions as "'If you had tramped on four bones'" (173) and "'She'd dote on a tongs'" (177). Only Charlotte Mullen and the lower-class characters in the novel

use such colorful language which provides much of the humor in the novel. Far from caricaturing Charlotte and such characters as Norry the Boat and Bid Sal, their discourse reflects the wit and humor of the speakers. In an article entitled "The Anglo-Irish Language," Somerville and Ross write:

Ireland has two languages; one of them is her own by birthright; the second of them is believed to be English, which is a fallacy; it is a fabric built by Irish architects with English bricks, quite unlike anything of English construction. The Anglo-Irish dialect is a passably good name for it, even though it implies an unseemly equality between artist and material, but it is something more than a dialect, more than an affair of pidgin English, bad spelling, provincialism, and preposterous grammar; it is a tongue pliant and subtle, expressing with every breath the mind of its makers. . . . Anglo-Irish remains to us a medium for poets and story-tellers that is scarcely to be surpassed, a treasury of idiom and simile meet for the service of literature. (184-85)

Charlotte's pronunciation and syntax are otherwise usually standard except when, as was the case with Julia Duffy and Lucy Lambert, she becomes very emotional, then she lapses into dialect. Realizing that Francie has had a quarrel with Dysart whom she hopes Francie will marry, she shouts, "'Have you the face to tell me there was nothing happened when even that fool Louisa could see that something had been going on to make you cry and to send him backing out of the house not a quarter of an hour after he came into it'" (223). In this tirade, one notices the colloquial expression "have you the face," the Anglo-Irish omission of the pluperfect tense in

"after he came into it," and the cleft construction, "there was nothing happened."

Unlike Julia Duffy, Charlotte exerts a far greater control over her fortunes; consequently, she uses language to further her ambitions and to insinuate herself among different speech communities or classes. Amongst the Dysarts she displays a knowledge of French and Latin; in the back streets of Lismoyle, she uses Irish to gain the people's confidence and to obtain information. From the earliest pages of the novel, Somerville and Ross demonstrate Charlotte's ability to code switch, not simply in different environments but almost in the same breath. Thus she addresses first the trap driver and then Francie on her arrival at Tally Ho Lodge. "'Take yer car out o' that, ye great oaf! . . . can't ye make way for your betters? Then with a complete change of voice, 'Well, me dear Francie, you're welcome, you're welcome.'" (22). Charlotte's audience awareness and her change in attitude is reflected both by her change of tone and dialect as well as by the narrator's comment. Again, much later in the novel, Charlotte in Lismoyle talks first to a fishmonger and then to Dysart: "'How are you again, Mr. Dysart? . . .'" She said in a voice that contrasted almost ludicrously with her last utterances" (211). In a novel where all the characters are identified in

some way or other by their voice, accent, or dialect, Charlotte's representation is the richest and most varied.

### **Gender Constructions and Sexual Commerce**

Although Charlotte would appear to embody the worst and most extreme aspects of the rural middle class and to personify the landed gentry's class enemy in the struggle for land and power, Charlotte's portrayal is, at times, astonishingly sympathetic. Charlotte, like Somerville and Ross, is a single woman who lacks the security and status of a husband, a fortune, or a recognized profession. Ann Owens Weekes states that "we might see in Charlotte a bitter and perhaps unconscious reflection of the authors' own status in their society" (78). Far from being "unconscious," Charlotte's representation, like the representation of the other women in the novel, is a very conscious representation of the fate of women, particularly single women within the patriarchy and within the world of Somerville and Ross. Certainly, Charlotte's, like Julia Duffy's, status as a single woman does reflect the authors' status as single women. As professional writers, managers of estates, and entrepreneurs, their lives parallel Charlotte's far more closely than they do Julia Duffy's, however. Furthermore, as a single, middle-class woman Charlotte does experience some advantages; for example, she enjoys considerably greater

autonomy than any other woman in the novel, and she answers to no one. It should also be remembered that this novel is an indictment of marriage as a financial arrangement within the patriarchy, an arrangement which enslaves both men and women, peasants and gentry alike. Yet Charlotte's position is not enviable. In a world which objectifies all women regardless of class according to two criteria, wealth and beauty, Charlotte has the misfortune to have been born ugly and poor. Worst of all, Charlotte has fallen in love with Roddy Lambert, a man of her own class who is also without fortune, who must, therefore, within the world of this novel, marry for money. Charlotte, however, retaining her indestructible peasant "good sense," seems to accept Lambert's marriage of convenience to a rich, widowed "turkey-hen," as a situation which seems unchangeable:

That Charlotte should have recognized the paramount necessity of his marrying money, had been to Lambert a proof of her eminent common sense. He had always been careful to impress his obvious destiny upon her, and he had always been grateful to that destiny for having harmlessly fulfilled itself, while old Mrs. Mullen's money was in her own keeping, and her niece was, beyond all question, ineligible. (175)

The tragic irony is that, unknown to Lambert and to the rest of the world, Lambert's rejection of her "had been more costly to Charlotte than any thing that had ever befallen her" (70). But Charlotte refuses to accept her fate as a discarded member of her society; thus, a single women in the



fiercely patriarchal society of nineteenth-century rural Ireland, Charlotte sets out to be revenged and to survive on her own while contriving to maintain a close friendship as well as a business relationship with Lambert.

In order to succeed financially in this male dominated world where a woman's status is valued only by her role as wife and mother, Charlotte assumes male characteristics.<sup>16</sup> We have already seen in the representation of Christopher Dysart that gender is an unstable construct, and this instability is particularly true in the case of Charlotte Mullen. Only Reynolds has noted Charlotte's "mannish good-fellowship" although Weekes remarks that "[b]oth the narrators and the other characters apply male adjectives or expectations to Charlotte" (76). However, Charlotte's confusion of gender is far deeper than critics have realized. A woman's identity in nineteenth-century Ireland was validated by her marital and maternal status. As we have seen in The Real Charlotte, to be a woman without children, or worse still, without a husband, is to be a nobody. In this sense, then, as Judith Butler comments, "gender is culturally constructed" (6). We may be born with sex, but we acquire gender through a cultural process that determines the way in which we interact with our environment, the way in which we represent ourselves, the way in which the world sees us as being represented, and, consequently, the way in which the

world represents us. Because the patriarchy necessarily defines and restricts gender roles, according to its needs and dictates, sex and gender tend to be synonymous. In the world of The Real Charlotte, however, those characters who are positioned outside the patriarchy--specifically outside its property- and land-based institution of marriage--through their resistance to marriage (the young Dysarts) or through their exclusion from it (Julia Duffy and Charlotte Mullen) reveal a contradiction between sex and gender, as did the authors themselves in their own lives. These characters subvert and resist the tyranny of gender imposed upon them by the patriarchy and its "'obligatory heterosexuality'" (Sedgwick 3). Weekes is correct when she states that

In Somerville and Ross's disintegrating world the confusion of gender is not only a symptom of the overt political disease that threatens society but also an indication of how the accident of gender determines one's life, creating another, more fundamental disease at the core of the social order. (77)

Charlotte's tragic fate is to be born ugly and penniless. References to her ill looks pervade the novel. She is a "short, thick figure" (6) with "opaque skin," "small bright eyes," "broad cheeks," and a "ponderous mass of brown hair" (7). She speaks "roughly" and has a "hard, jeering voice." Frequent references are made to her "heavy" "extended jaw" (50, 201, 204), and to her broad hands (203, 229). In fact, people are repulsed by her appearance; she is referred to as

that "disgusting creature." And Charlotte does not deceive herself. She is ruthlessly honest with herself: "Each time Charlotte stood before her glass, her ugliness spoke to her of her failure, and goaded her to revenge." Her failure is that of a woman who has failed to marry, and who has failed, therefore, to be recognized as a woman in her male-dominated society. She avenges herself on that society by becoming a successful entrepreneur; realizing that she has no sexual power over men as a woman, she will dominate them intellectually and financially.

As we shall see, all references to Charlotte's sexuality or to her desire for Lambert are linked to her financial power and desire. Charlotte subverts the values of the patriarchy for her own ends. Early in the novel, the narrator explains:

She was under no delusion as to her appearance, and early recognizing its hopeless character, she had abandoned all superfluities of decoration. A habit of costume so defiantly simple as to border on eccentricity had at least two advantages; it freed her from the absurdity of seeming to admire herself, and it was cheap. (10)

Not only is Charlotte unfeminine, she is frequently described in masculine terms. Adjectives such as "stiff" and "rigid" are used to describe her deportment and the lines of her face. She reacts to Dysart "as a man in armour" (315); she has "a general's eye" (217). Charlotte does not simply look like a man, she thinks and acts like one. Her strong will is

frequently alluded to (59, 204, 223, 267); she has "common sense" and a "strong brain" (175), characteristics which were certainly not regarded as female. She also thinks of herself as "a landed proprietor" and she notes that her latest property, Gurthnamuckla, is "beginning to look like a gentleman's avenue" (258).

Charlotte's male gender identity is most evident from the extraordinary manner in which she is accepted into the male domain of Lismoyle society. Undoubtedly, Charlotte has become one of the boys. She has a good sense of humor; she can tell a good story; she smokes (67), drinks, and curses (234) and, what is more, she is praised for her conduct as a man would be by other men: "'Charlotte could take her whack,' he was wont to say to their mutual friends in that tone of humorous appreciation that is used in connection with a gentlemanlike capacity for liquor" (234). She joins the men in their political conversations (13), even daring to interrupt their talk. But Charlotte is not intimidated by men. As a young woman, she adopts the Oedipal role in her filial rebellion, and, after her father's death, she resents not being allowed to inherit his position as land agent when she is clearly more able than Lambert. In her attempts to marry off Francie, she also assumes the traditional male role so that Dysart feels that he has become her "prize" (208);

furthermore, Lambert remarks, "'God help the man that's got to fight with Charlotte, anyhow!'" (28).

Charlotte is driven by two passions: her desire to control Lambert and her desire to own land. Within the context of the patriarchy, she can now acquire both only if she possess a male identity, having failed to possess Lambert as a woman. Throughout the novel, Charlotte and Lambert, the two middle-class characters, are engaged in a struggle for domination over each other, despite their close friendship. Lambert, also, is desperately trying to raise himself through the social and class ranks of Lismoyle, an ambition he too can only achieve, as a man, through marriage, money, and land. In his struggle to achieve rank, Charlotte is at once his accomplice and his rival, and together they plan to evict Julia Duffy and acquire the property and land of Gurthnamuckla. Charlotte subverts the patriarchy by assuming a male identity and by refusing to submit to the poverty and social obscurity the patriarchy inflicts upon a single woman. Once she has been accepted by the patriarchy, however, she fully appropriates its values and does not hesitate to destroy Julia Duffy, one of her own class, a single, Protestant, Anglo-Irish woman. As a result of their conspiracy, Charlotte is able to develop a homoerotic relationship with Lambert.<sup>17</sup> Charlotte is almost successful in achieving both her desires, possessing Lambert and Gurthnamuckla, until

Lambert falls in love with the young, lovely, but penniless Francie. Although she accepts the patriarchy, Charlotte finally loses Lambert as a result of her own jealousy, hatred, treachery, and over-reaching ambition. She is also, finally, the victim of the hierarchial class and gender structure of the patriarchy.

The homoerotic relationship that exists between Charlotte and Lambert clearly supports their ambition to move out of their class. Just as Charlotte subverts the patriarchy by refusing to accept her inferior position as a woman, Charlotte and Lambert refuse to accept their subaltern class position, and they are united in their desire to oust Julia Duffy from her position and to become landowners themselves. Furthermore, this relationship is clearly documented in the text by the narrative comments, the characters' dialogue, and the plot. Charlotte's first visit to Gurthnamuckla rapidly follows that of Lambert and Francie's. As she approaches the farm, "an often repressed desire asserted itself, and Charlotte heaved a sigh that was as romantic in its way as if she had been sweet and twenty, instead of tough and forty" (59). The sexual imagery used to express Charlotte's ambition to own land is obvious. McHugh and Harmon have noticed that "there is also an artistic use of the tensions underlying the whole question of land in Ireland" (184), but only Thomas Flanagan has pointed out that Charlotte "is

driven by the inveterate Irish greed for land, but this is matched and subtly linked to a dour, joyless sexuality" (62). Such restless energy, desire, and ambition are the attributes which distinguish the rising middle-class so profoundly from the lethargic and apathetic gentry.

Following their separate visits to Julia Duffy's property, Charlotte and Lambert exchange notes, but, already, their lack of solidarity and their competitiveness begin to assert themselves and to subvert their own class solidarity. The conflict that ensues between them is expressed in the discourse of the marketplace, but, clearly, the power struggle is confused by the reemergence of Charlotte's feminine nature which cannot be totally suppressed. Lambert wants to buy horses, so he asks Charlotte a favor, to lend him the money. Charlotte hesitates and prevaricates, "'Well, you know I'm a poor woman'" but then she agrees to lend him "'a couple of hundred,'" a considerable sum. Lambert is amazed, but his reaction to Charlotte's seeming submission and generosity is expressed once again by the narrator in sexual terms.

Lambert became very red. The possibility of some such climax as this had floated in a sub-current of thought just below the level of formed ideas, but now that it had come, it startled him. It was an unheard of thing that Charlotte should make such an offer as this. It gave him suddenly a tingling sense of power, and at the same time a strange instinct of disgust and shame. (69)

The scene does not end here. Characteristically, Charlotte is thinking ahead, "'who knows, if I get the farm, that we mightn't make a joint-stock business out of it . . . '" Clearly she is thinking of securing her joint ambitions: Lambert and land. Lambert is embarrassed; he calls Charlotte "'a true friend,'" and "unable to think of anything else to say, and, lifting his hand from the splashboard, he put it on hers, that lay in her lap with the reins in it, and pressed it for a moment." Lambert believes that, once again, he is able to dominate Charlotte sexually although now she holds the reins and controls him financially. At this point, the narrative comments contrast only the present and past situations, the period of their youth when Lambert, evidently, controlled Charlotte sexually.

Into both their minds shot simultaneously the remembrance of a somewhat similar scene, when, long ago, Charlotte had come to the help of her father's pupil, and he had expressed his gratitude in a more ardent manner--a manner that had seemed cheap enough to him at the time, but that had never been more costly to Charlotte than any other thing that had ever befallen her. (69-70)

Once again, the discourse used to describe Charlotte's past sexual and emotional experience is the discourse of commerce. Because it is situated within the patriarchy, Charlotte and Lambert's relationship is assessed as a marriage would be within the patriarchy. It is a commercial transaction inextricably intertwined with the possession and transfer of



money and land. The desire for land is expressed in sexual terms as sexual desire is confused with the desire for ownership and control.

The previous scene occurs fairly early in the novel, but as the plot unfolds and as Charlotte becomes increasingly successful and financially powerful, her male identity asserts itself more completely. In another interview that occurs much later in the novel where Charlotte and Lambert once again discuss their joint venture, Gurthnamuckla, Charlotte now dominates Lambert on account of his financial indebtedness to her while her desire for Lambert seems to be a parody of its former self. Lambert laments the fact that Duffy's pastures are going to waste. She replies, "'If you and I had it, Roddy,' said Charlotte, eyeing him with a curious, guarded tenderness, 'it wouldn't be that way'" (174). Once again the narrator insinuates that Lambert believes that Charlotte has given him the money because of her desire for him, but now he also realizes that "he held his advantage upon precarious terms" (174). However, Lambert continues to discuss their mutual ambition in sexual terms, "'I think I'll leave you a little more space than that, Charlotte, if ever we stable our horses together.'" The narrator adds, "She glanced at him, as aware of the *double entendre*, and as stirred by it as he had intended her to be"

(175). At this point, the narrator makes it abundantly clear that in the world of The Real Charlotte sexual desire and the ambition for land are inseparable. What cannot be forgotten, however, is that if Charlotte had not made every effort to subvert the patriarchy by suppressing her feminine gender, and, ultimately, her sexuality, she would, paradoxically, never have been in a position to enjoy this new and different relationship with Lambert--a relationship in which they are both equals, a relationship in which physical beauty has no part, and a relationship in which Charlotte might eventually dominate. However, as Mary Jacobus has pointed out, "this access to a male-dominated culture may equally be felt to bring with it alienation, repression, division . . . a silencing of the 'feminine,' a loss of woman's inheritance" (10). Such is Charlotte's fate.

With Lucy Lambert's death, Charlotte's twin desires are on the point of being fulfilled. "She saw herself settled at Gurthnamuckla, with Roddy riding over three or four times a week to see his young horses . . . while she, the bland lady of the manor, should show what a really intelligent woman could do at the head of affairs" (233). When Charlotte thinks about herself, she represents herself as a woman; but, although "she was happier than she had ever been since the time when Lambert was a lanky young clerk in her father's office" (234), Charlotte does not appear to be thinking in

terms of marriage so that her desire for Lambert remains possessive, controlling, and homosocial. Nevertheless, there is no mistaking the narrator's sympathy for Charlotte on the eve of her downfall: "She had fought a losing battle against fate all her life, and she could not be expected to regret having accepted its first overture of friendship" (234). But, in a few seconds, her glimpse of happiness fades as Lambert mentions Francie. The narrator's sympathy also wanes as Charlotte's ugly nature is exposed once more: "her hot face looked its ugliest as some of the hidden hatred showed itself" (235). This is a novel without certainty, stability, or happiness.

As Charlotte had suspected and as she had shown Lucy Lambert, Lambert has fallen in love with Francie. Consequently, Charlotte's victory over Lambert and her ability to control and possess him are short-lived. Nevertheless she has become the proprietor of Gurthnamuckla. The suppression of her female identity has indeed been partially rewarded; furthermore, Charlotte is at the point where she is able to balance both her identities, male and female: "her wakeful nights were spent in schemings in which the romantic and the practical were logically blended" (260). This precarious balance of her dual identities is brief and quickly upset by the news of Lambert's marriage to Francie: "she had been dealt the hardest blow that life could give her" (267), and

the reader is allowed to observe Charlotte alone in her anger and grief. It is at once an impressive and repulsive spectacle, but one that is also not without sympathy and admiration. For a few moments, Charlotte loses control: "she saw herself helpless, and broken, and aimless for the rest of her life"; at this point, she embodies the despair of every rejected woman who envisages a meaningless life as a Welsh aunt within the nineteenth-century patriarchy.<sup>15</sup> But Charlotte's will-power, so frequently commented upon, reasserts itself, and she decides to go on, "I won't break down" (268), she repeats.

In this scene, we learn also that Charlotte had, in fact, been thinking of marriage although "even to herself she could not now admit that he had gulled her into believing that he would eventually marry her" (268). As always, Charlotte possesses a merciless sense of reality and honesty; she never fools herself. Now the true cause of Charlotte's anger and grief is exposed. She grieves not for lost love but for the thought "of how she had been hoodwinked and fooled, by a man to whom she had all her life laid down the law" (268). The thought that Lambert has finally triumphed in their relationship of mutual deception drives "her half mad again." Her pride has been deeply wounded, and her belief in her ability to control him intellectually has been questioned. Throughout, Charlotte had believed that she had been

the dominant partner in their relationship. Charlotte's reaction at this most private and revealing moment is not that of a woman mourning her lost love but of a strategist who has been outwitted. The reader is left with the final view of Charlotte consoling and reinvigorating herself with brandy, but also silencing herself by the same action: "She put the bottle to her mouth and took a long gulp from it, while the tears ran down her face" (268). Once again, as Charlotte exists in the contact zone between two genders, her male and female identities reveal themselves.

Having decided to go on, Charlotte sets about subverting and destroying Lambert and Francie's marriage, using Hawkins as the catalyst. Clearly, however, Charlotte no longer desires Lambert since she finally realizes that she is unable to possess him; the desire to control is replaced by the desire to destroy, so she settles on ruining him with her knowledge of his financial affairs, the one area of their lives in which she still dominates. Despite her skill and determination, Charlotte cannot completely fulfill her ambitions, however. Her knowledge and will-power are ultimately overpowered by the class and gender structure of the patriarchy and by her passions of hatred, jealousy, and revenge which unbalance her traits of self-control, logic, and strategy. Having discovered that Lambert has been embezzling his employer's money, she sets out to betray her

former love. In so doing, Charlotte also betrays her own class; though couched in Charlotte's hypocritical language, the antinomies are clearly laid out in her speech to Dysart: "'not knowing how to decide between me affection for me friend and my duty to the son of my dear father's old employer!'" (313). Charlotte never experiences doubt or conflict in achieving her ambitions. She eagerly attempts to destroy Lambert as she destroyed Julia Duffy, but this time she has underestimated the strength of the patriarchy "and the solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Jacobus).<sup>13</sup> Dysart is not as malleable as Charlotte had expected. Although Charlotte has often been included in the male domain, she remains essentially female, and, in a moment of crisis and choice, the solidarity of the patriarchy asserts itself against her. Dysart's authority also reasserts itself even though, paradoxically, it is against his own class interests. "Little as he liked Lambert, he sided with him now with something more than a man's ordinary resentment against feminine espionage upon another man" (313). Dysart's sympathy for his own gender is stronger than his class allegiance. At a critical moment in the novel, homosocial desire within the patriarchy supersedes class solidarity; Dysart subverts the patriarchy by bonding with Lambert to oppose Charlotte.

Although Charlotte resists the denial of her final victory "as a man in armour might," she cannot help but fulfill the female role that is being imposed upon her. In a final ironic twist, Dysart treats Charlotte like a woman, and fulfilling his expectation, Charlotte begins to act like a woman and loses control; torn between her two opposing identities Charlotte begins to disintegrate: "She was losing hold of herself; her gestures were of the sort that she usually reserved for her inferiors, and the corners of her mouth bubbled like a snail" (315). Finally, abandoning all her strategy, she exposes the depth of her hatred and reveals her final betrayal to Lambert so that she cannot fully savor her ultimate moment of revenge. Even in that last scene, the narrator's sympathy for Charlotte is reinstated as we are reminded of her past history and the injustice of the patriarchy which had awakened her feminine sexuality but never allowed it to be fulfilled: "Lambert stood quite still, staring at her, trying to believe that this was the Charlotte who had trembled when he had kissed her, whose love for him made her his useful and faithful thrall" (342). In her youth, Charlotte's representation had matched Lambert's ideal of the female: a frail, loving, desirable, useful, faithful slave--"an Irish woman" (Reynolds 20). For a moment, we are reminded of Francie as we are reminded of all Irish women of this period who, the narrator suggests, are enthralled by the

patriarchy but who also enthrall themselves to their own desire.

### Conclusion

All the characters in the novels who strive to change their fates, to change their assigned roles in society, attempt in some way to subvert the patriarchy, yet all are unsuccessful. In the world of Somerville and Ross, the gentry destroy themselves from within. The celibacy of the two Dysart children ensures their class's demise, and we know little of the younger son. Of all the women in a novel which strives not to present women as the sole victims of the patriarchy, Charlotte alone survives. Lucy Lambert, Julia Duffy, and Francie Fitzpatrick all die indirectly on account of Charlotte. Again contradictions emerge. These women are most certainly the victims of the patriarchal structure of their society and the victims of the woman who most completely assumes and exposes the values of that society--Charlotte Mullen. Although Charlotte differs in class from the Dysarts, her desire for power and for land parodies the past desires of the gentry: to own land. But her desire can only be fulfilled by her assumption of a male gender identity. Of course, hers is a pyrrhic victory since in her struggle to subvert and outwit the patriarchy, she is represented as suppressing her sexuality, her female identity which crosses



class and racial boundaries: hence she becomes alienated from her true self, the real Charlotte that Francie alone had discovered.

This novel concerns itself primarily with the lives of women who attempt to recreate their identities in a changing society. As suffragists, Somerville and Ross were actively seeking change in women's lives in a society that they recognized to be unjust. As women of the gentry, they had been bred to believe in their own essential superiority, and, yet, as realists and as keen observers of society, they knew that their position as women and as women of the gentry class was no longer tenable. They were also able to see, perhaps reluctantly, that the class to which they belonged, and which they held to be superior in certain respects, was the very class which maintained the repressive structure of the patriarchy, that as women, they experienced at first hand. Charlotte, in all her complexity, embodies the future capitalist spirit which Somerville and Ross see invading Ireland and for which they see no alternative. A passage which provides the setting for Charlotte's revelation to Dysart signifies the change that is taking place all over Ireland:

Civilization at Bruff had marched away from the turf quay. . . . In old days every fire at Bruff had been landed at the turf quay from the bogs at the other side of the lake; but now, since the railway had come to Lismoye, coal had taken its place. It was in vain that

Thady the turf cutter had urged that turf was a far handsomer thing about a gentleman's place than coal. (312)<sup>42</sup>

Thady and the narrator regret the passing away of the Gaelic-Irish customs, changes that would effect the lives of both the gentry and the people. But just as Dysart does not hear Julia or Charlotte, no one listens to Thady. He urges in vain. Celtic civilization is "marching away." Taking its place is the invasion of English industrial capitalism, a different civilization, symbolized by its railway and its coal. In this passage the narrator, along with Thady, identifies with the Gaelic-Irish past. Dreading the changes that they knew were necessary, Somerville and Ross attempted to retrieve that past and to become a part of it, so they translated that world in their writing. If they did regret the passing away of the world of the landed gentry, it was because it had given them an identity, albeit an identity that was becoming increasingly fragmented. Now they knew they were in the contact zone, between two worlds, the past and the future. Like Charlotte Mullen, Somerville and Ross knew that in order to situate themselves in that new world, as they must in order to survive, they would need to create new identities for themselves, whatever the cost.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Mary Chamberlain (128).

<sup>2</sup> This is a precise example of what feminists such as Sedgwick and Rubin have been describing.

<sup>3</sup> See Ruth Sherry.

<sup>4</sup> See Judith Kegan Gardiner.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "homosocial desire" as Sedgwick uses it to describe the "continuum" of male bonding which exists in the patriarchy and which includes the homosexual and homosocial.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Weekes insists on referring to Ascendancy which is an inaccurate description of the Anglo-Irish in 1894 since their economic and political power was waning.

<sup>7</sup> It is also worth noting that Dysart's Irishness has been infected by his English education and his sojourn in the colonies: "Mrs. Baker had, indeed, suggested that it was sending him to these grand English universities, instead of to Trinity College, Dublin, that had taken the fun out of him in the first going off, and what finished him was going out to those Barbadoes, with all the blacks bowing down to him" (45).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that Guy Fehlmann, whose study of Somerville and Ross's writing focuses on the sociological realism of their work and their representation of the different classes in rural Ireland, makes no reference to the question of marriage although the works of Connell and Arensberg and Kimbell were readily available.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to point out that although The Real Charlotte was written in the 1890s, Charlotte is not a "new woman." The context for this novel is Ireland and not England. Charlotte, unlike the new women of the English middle classes, does not have the opportunity to refuse marriage.

<sup>10</sup> McHugh and Harmon define her as "Protestant middle-class" (183); Eagleton as a "down-at-heel gentlewoman" (215); and Kiberd as one of the "new peasant proprietors" (73).

<sup>11</sup> Myrtle Hill and Vivienne Pollock note that the Universities (Ireland) Act of 1879 established the Royal University of Ireland which granted degrees and scholarships to both men and women, but this change would only benefit "a minority of privileged women" (110).

<sup>12</sup> Although Charlotte's desire for land may seem to be characteristic of the peasant class, Fehlmann argues that "les membres de cette nouvelle classe . . . ne ressemblaient pas aux paysans en ce sens qu'ils n'étaient pas comme ces derniers étroitement attachés à la glèbe." Nevertheless, "ces bourgeois irlandais se conduisèrent rarement comme des parvenus; ils gardaient de leurs origines paysannes un bon sens indestructible" (261).

<sup>13</sup> Among Standard English speakers there are also variations, however. Sir Benjamin uses such colloquial expressions as "Begad" and Pamela speaks "in the soft voice that was just Irish enough for Saxons of the more ignorant sort to fail to distinguish, save in degree, between it and . . . [a] Dublin brogue" 317.

<sup>14</sup> See Trudghill, 13-50.

<sup>15</sup> See Bliss.

<sup>16</sup> Whether Charlotte purposely assumes male characteristics to enter the male domain, or whether her gender adapts to the male environment she increasingly inhabits is never very clear. However, as we shall soon see, she has willingly abandoned "all superfluities of decoration" in her appearance."

<sup>17</sup> Once again I refer to Sedgwick's continuum of homo-social desire. On this continuum, assuming a male identity, Charlotte is able to enter a relationship with Lambert which is "potentially erotic" (Sedgwick 1).

<sup>18</sup> The authors originally thought of using this as the title.

<sup>19</sup> See Mary Jacobus. "The Difference of View" in Women Writing and Writing About Women.

<sup>20</sup> Weekes argues that "the narrators of The Real Charlotte urge that their society, the society of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, is far handsomer than the emerging society of the Gaelic-Irish peasantry, and like Thady too the narrators have

a vested interest in the preservation of this society." (82). This is a curious interpretation. What is being said here is just the very opposite.

### CHAPTER 3

#### LIVING ON THE BORDERLANDS: THE SEARCH FOR A NATIONAL IDENTITY

Twenty-five years had elapsed between the publication of The Real Charlotte (1894) and the publication of the first of the two novels to be considered in this chapter, Mount Music (1919) and The Enthusiast (1921). I intend to consider these two novels as a pair since they are the most consciously political novels to be published by the writers and since they were both written within two years of each other at a time when Irish politics were in a state of flux and the fate of the Anglo-Irish, as well as the Irish nation as a whole, had not yet been settled. Furthermore, although they have been almost completely overlooked by the critics, and despite their favorable reception at the time of publication, these two novels provide a perspective on Anglo-Irish Ireland on the eve of its demise. While the structure of these novels does not compare with the tight-knit plot of The Real Charlotte, they contain several complex characterizations, and contemporary historical events are far more evident than in the earlier novel. Furthermore, these novels also complicate our understanding of Somerville's positioning just before the establishment of the Irish Free State.

Although Mount Music and An Enthusiast still focus primarily on the Anglo-Irish world of the Big House, and

although the main protagonists of both novels are Anglo-Irish, a considerable change takes place in the representation of the different classes and in the thematic shift of emphasis. The tensions created between the ownership of land and its relationship to the marriage market are still present, but both these novels directly confront the "Irish problem": religion and politics. Moreover, Mount Music was written with the stated purpose of explaining the Irish situation to English readers (340) while, in the Preface to An Enthusiast, the author states that she aspires to "the cold virtue of Impartiality." The reason for this difference in purpose, theme, and representation can partly be explained by a change in authorship: Ross died in 1915, so these two novels, as well as The Big House of Inver, are the work of Somerville alone. However, the shift in political orientation apparent in these novels must also derive from Somerville's involvement in political organizations as well as her reactions to the turbulent state of Irish politics in the early twentieth century.

Despite her literary successes, Somerville was not totally devoted to writing; she was, for example, also an active suffragist during this period. In 1910, Somerville became the president of the Munster Women's Franchise League and Ross its Vice-President. Allied to the Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation, it was a very active branch which

included both Unionists and Nationalist.' During this period, she and Ross began to learn Irish. Somerville also became increasingly concerned with maintaining Drishane and, consequently, involved herself in farming and business enterprises. In 1906, she and her sister, Hildegarde, bought 300 acres around Drishane, and, three years later, with a brother, began a dairy farm. Quite possibly, they were influenced in this venture by the ideas of their acquaintance, Sir Horace Plunkett, an Anglo-Irish reformer who believed that Ireland's troubles were economic rather than political. Lewis writes, "Plunkett, like Edith, had grasped that the battle over land-ownership had obscured the problems of land maintenance and improvement, and how best to produce and distribute agricultural produce" (172-73). Somerville's experiences in the suffrage movement as well as her experiences as an entrepreneur must certainly have changed her way of looking at society and her place within it. Although she always had daily contact with "the people" of West Cork, she did so in her position as a daughter of the landed gentry, "from her horse." As a business woman and as a suffragist, however, she began to meet people of other classes on an equal footing. Even her attitude to women began to change so that she could begin to see the obvious disparities in the lives of working-class women and upper- and middle-class women: for example, she noticed the



treatment working-class women suffered at the hands of the police during their political demonstrations. As Declan Kiberd has pointed out, "The ways in which the police abused and manhandled working-class suffragists convinced her that it was the duty of aristocratic women to put their bodies on the line at demonstrations" (81).

### **Ireland 1910-21**

Historically, this was also the period when Ireland finally achieved its independence from Great Britain and became the Irish Free State. With the failure of the Irish convention in 1918, there were some Anglo-Irish, who, like Edith Somerville, remained in Ireland and supported Home Rule; they too were against partition, but they were unable to relinquish their own particular identity and support Sinn Fein. These people were largely without representation between 1918 and 1922. When Parnell resigned in 1890, the Home Rule party was split, but after the 1910 elections, when Redmond and the Irish Party held the balance of power, Home Rule was expected. There was, however, fierce reaction from unionists in Belfast and the north of Ireland to the threat of Home Rule and a Dublin parliament. Resistance was led by the Anglo-Irishman, Sir Edward Carson, M.P., who "held that home rule would be disastrous for Ireland and, sharing the widespread illusion that Southern Ireland could not survive

as a viable economic entity without the support of industrial Belfast, he seized on the Ulster question more to prevent self-government for Ireland than to achieve it for Ulster" (Lee, Ireland 6).

By the beginning of the decade, "the ideas of the Fenians, of Griffith and of Connolly had been fused together" and "had been reinforced and partly transformed" (Beckett, Making 416) by the cultural nationalists of the Gaelic League founded by Douglas Hyde. When the insurrection took place in 1916, it was regarded as an "essentially Dublin affair" (Lee, Modernisation 157), so it would not have affected the lives of the people in southwest Cork, for example. However, when the British government executed the fifteen leaders who had surrendered, the mood of the country changed. Edith Somerville (like W. B. Yeats) was in England at the time, but on May 7, she wrote a letter to the London Times pleading for clemency on the part of the prisoners and signing herself "An Irishwoman" (Lewis 160-61).

The negotiations for Home Rule that followed the Easter Rising took place between Lloyd George, Carson, and Redmond, but the surviving revolutionary leaders, who now held the political power in the country, were not included. Home Rule would be granted, but Home Rule would exclude the six northern counties where the unionists held a majority; Ireland would be divided. Beckett writes that "Redmond

supposed that the exclusion was to be temporary, Carson that it was permanent" (442). In the meantime, Lloyd George

convoked the Irish Convention in July to encourage representatives of all shades of Irish opinion to reconcile their divergent views. The convention, predictably, failed to resolve anything. Sinn Fein refused to attend, and Ulster unionists revealed once more an eloquent command of the vocabulary of negation. Nevertheless the convention recorded the conversion of many Anglo-Irish, as distinct from the Scotch-Irish, to some form of home rule. It was to prove of the highest importance for the nature of the emerging state that a substantial section of the Anglo-Irish, even at the eleventh hour, should begin to adopt a positive attitude towards the implications of their vanished supremacy. (Lee, Modernisation 158)

While given little attention in Irish history, the Convention is significant to this study because it is the last time in the history of Ireland that the Anglo-Irish as a political group would be in a position of leadership. As Lee points out, the Convention also highlights the difference between the northern and southern unionists on the issue of a united Ireland, a difference which is represented in An Enthusiast. Furthermore, the chairman of the Irish Convention was Sir Horace Plunkett, an Anglo-Irishman who was a friend of Somerville and Ross's. Somerville visited him while she was composing An Enthusiast, and the life and political philosophy of the main protagonist of An Enthusiast, Dan Palliser, closely resembles those of Horace Plunkett.<sup>4</sup>

Plunkett's significant influence upon the Free State's "strong central culture" is commented upon by Stephen Gwynn,

nationalist M.P. for Donegal and friend and correspondent of Martin Ross. Naming the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde, W. B. Yeats, John Synge, George Moore, St. John Ervine, Lennox Robinson and Sinn Fein as some influences he adds:

All these separate activities were in touch with one another, by attraction or repulsion: but Sir Horace Plunkett perhaps more than anyone else helped to create out of these a central culture. His wide sympathies drew about him a group of young men and women concerned generally for the welfare of Ireland, in which no shade of Irish thought and no Irish personality was accounted alien. (Ireland 118)

Plunkett is remembered chiefly for his co-operative campaign, launched in 1889: "the essence of Plunkett's teaching was that the basic problem of Irish rural life was social and economic rather than political, that it should be tackled at once, on a basis of self-help" (Beckett 408). He was helped in his efforts by R. A. Anderson, a young land agent, and by a Jesuit priest, Father Tom Finlay. The Irish Agricultural Organization Society, founded in 1894, was a non-political and non-sectarian society of co-operatives that had originated among the dairy farmers and creameries of the south west. It produced a journal, the Irish Homestead, edited by the poet, George Russell (AE), to which Somerville and Ross contributed articles. In ten years, the organization of creameries had a turnover of three million pounds, handled by eight hundred local co-operative societies. During the Anglo-Irish War (1920-21), the creameries were

burned by the Black and Tans as reprisals against the Republicans (West 189-93); finally, they were closed by the British in 1921, having been designated by the Black and Tans as "'mere camouflage for murder'" (193). Starting out as a progressive unionist, by 1911 Plunkett regarded himself as a Home Ruler; he was appointed Chairman of the Irish Convention (1917-18). Plunkett never married, but, according to his biographer, Trevor West, he enjoyed a close relationship with a married woman, his cousin's wife, Lady Fingal (15), also a friend of Edith Somerville's. His Dublin house was burned by Republicans in January 1923; that year he resigned his Senate seat, left Ireland, and died in England in 1932.

The Irish Convention lasted from July 1917 to April 1918 and recommended Home Rule for all of Ireland. Beckett writes that "its decision was irrelevant to the situation that had by that time developed, and the government did not even attempt to effect it" (443). While the Convention was meeting, Sinn Fein was gaining strength. De Valera won a major electoral victory over the Home Rule candidate in an East Clare by-election in July 1917 and took over the leadership of Sinn Fein. In the 1918 election, the Home Rule party was devastated, retaining only six seats, while Sinn Fein secured seventy-three seats and the unionists twenty-six. De Valera had asked Labour not to put forward any candidates. Although Sinn Fein did not take part

directly in the 1916 uprising, Lee points out that after 1916, "Sinn Fein came to be used as an umbrella term for the anti-home rule nationalist movement in the following years" (Modernisation 157). This is also the way in which Somerville uses the term in An Enthusiast. In January 1919 the elected Sinn Fein representatives met and proclaimed themselves the parliament of the Irish Republic, Dail Eireann, whose membership "was overwhelmingly young, Catholic and generally, lower middle class" (Foster 495).

Somerville was directly affected by these events. Because of its geographical location, Castletownsend has always been isolated, but during the Anglo-Irish war communications were completely cut off. Drishane was visited by the I.R.A. (Collis 204), and Somerville was aware of atrocities on both sides. Thus she writes: "'The Crown outrages are appalling . . . and some people say the Republicans get £500 for killing a policeman'" (205). While friends urge her to leave Ireland, Somerville seems fairly confident that she will be safe. She appears concerned for the welfare of the local people, a concern clearly voiced both in An Enthusiast and in a letter where she notes that the farm boys are victimized by both the Republicans and the British: "'The wretched boys are dragged out by force and then captured and shot' by the Crown forces" (205).

Meanwhile, in May 1921, elections were held again and one hundred and twenty-four of the one hundred and twenty eight members were Sinn Fein. In June, the Northern Ireland parliament was opened. Finally, in December, a treaty that partitioned Ireland was signed, establishing the Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion in which the Irish M.P.s had to take an oath of allegiance to the British crown. De Valera resigned, refusing to accept the treaty, and, in 1922, civil war ensued, a war which Somerville certainly envisages in An Enthusiast.

#### I.

#### MOUNT MUSIC

Mount Music is possibly Somerville's most optimistic novel written at a time when those who had become Home Rulers and sided with the nationalist cause still clung to the belief that there would be a place for them within a united Ireland, independent of Britain but still part of the Commonwealth. In spite of a cobbled conclusion, Mount Music ends fairly hopefully; the young lovers are free to be united, and there is certainly a strong suggestion that a marriage will take place. Furthermore, through the demise of the older generation, there is some hope for a new Ireland, one without religious bigotry. Nevertheless, Ireland is

still represented as a place where the younger generation of the Anglo-Irish remain its moral leaders.

The novel begins in Ireland of the 1890s when "the class known as Landed Gentry was still pre-eminent" (11); there are references to the Land League, the Gaelic League (142), and, later, the 1903 Land Act (177). Mount Music has little plot; in fact rather like a George Bernard Shaw play, Somerville creates the characters and lets them talk. Their conversations usually concern religion, so the topics quickly become political: as the narrator remarks, Barty Mangan "had not meant to talk politics" (316), but inevitably almost every conversation turns to the Irish question, i.e. politics. Describing itself as a "history" (8), Mount Music's penetrating examination of the Anglo-Irish and the causes of their demise differs considerably from the writers' previous novels. With only a few, minor exceptions, the landed gentry in this novel can be divided into two groups, the old and the young. The older generation are represented critically and often unsympathetically, chiefly because of their inability to adapt to the changing situations in Ireland. By contrast, the younger generation, willing to cross, or at least approach, the boundaries of class, race, and religion, are sometimes represented as pragmatists or idealized as being the solution to Ireland's divisions. The plot centers almost entirely on the rise and fall of two families: the affluent,



middle-class, Catholic Mangans and the upper-class, Protestant Talbot-Lowrys of Mount Music. The children of these two families not only socialize together but form romantic and political alliances across religious and class boundaries. Despite such radical possibilities, and despite the emigration of the older Talbot-Lowrys and the death of the Mangan patriarch, the novel eventually supports the status quo. Although Mount Music promotes the union of two religions in marriage, it eventually favors the union of two people of the same upper class. Religious boundaries supported by class divisions have not been spanned.

From this brief summary, it must be clear that this is quite a different novel from The Real Charlotte. Women, regardless of class or religion, are generally represented as possessing a far greater degree of autonomy, but the focus on the construction of the female gender is absent from Mount Music and An Enthusiast so that it becomes clear that feminist issues have been subsumed by national concerns. The novel has other considerations. Somerville, in a kind of afterword, admits that this novel "has not aspired to being a story, and is no more than an effort to lift, for a moment, the inevitable curtain that hangs between Irish and English every-day life" (340). Hence Somerville's purpose seems to be to render the Irish situation comprehensible to the English, who have never understood social relationships in

Ireland or its preoccupation with religion. In addition, Somerville is also attempting to render a self-critical representation of the Anglo-Irish to the emerging Irish nation. Although Somerville states in the afterword that she is addressing an English audience, she is certainly translating her experiences and those of her class to a new Irish audience, attempting to find a real place for the Anglo-Irish in this new Ireland where "'[e]verything's changing hands, and everyone's changing sides. You don't know what'll happen next'" (Mount Music 315). As C. L. Innes explains:

In Ireland literature in English which seeks to speak to the question of Irish identity (as so much of it does), is complicated not only by the difficulty of defining that identity and the political issues involved, but also by the problem of multiple audiences--Catholic or Protestants; Irish, Anglo-Irish, and English; male and female. It is almost impossible for Anglo-Irish writers to take for granted a common set of assumptions, religious, political or cultural, between themselves and their audiences, while the significance of the writers' subjects as well as the language they write in will be wrestled with and over by varying communities to whom or for whom the writers speak. (28-29)

This novel sets out to demonstrate that what unnecessarily divides the Irish, and Somerville unquestionably employs an all-inclusive interpretation of Irishness, is religion. The novel implies, rather simplistically, that if Irish people were to follow the example of the two young, tolerant--Anglo-Irish--protagonists, who fall in love with each other despite their different religions, Ireland's problems might be more readily solved.

Mount Music has received little attention from the critics, but Conor Cruise O'Brien, one of the few to comment on this novel, writes that the "central theme of Mount Music is one of which Irish writers have in general tended to fight rather shy, that of Religious Intolerance, on the part of both Protestants and Catholics. Miss Somerville . . . follows its devious workings with remarkable detachment" (qtd. in Lane and Lane 113). Robinson writes: "The ways in which nationalism and religion are minor issues, subordinate to the acquisition of land and money, is the main theme of the book" (152). Certainly, "the acquisition of land and money" is a major concern of the plot, but it is not a central theme as in The Real Charlotte. Religion, on the other hand, is not a minor issue; in fact, Mount Music appears to center explicitly on "religious intolerance" and its capacity to divide the Irish people. Nevertheless, implicit in the representation of religious intolerance is the search for an inclusive, unifying identity, a unity which is, however, constantly being undermined by class division supported, of course, by religion."

I would propose, therefore, that the main theme of the novel is the examination of the nature of religious bigotry in Ireland as, supported by class, it undermines the possibility of a unifying, national identity. Underlying the theme is the author's concern for Ireland's future and, in

particular, the future of the Anglo-Irish. Furthermore, implicit in the search for an inclusive Irish national identity is the desire for an identity which will resist being defined as exclusively Catholic and middle-class and which will also include the Protestant Anglo-Irish.

### **Constructing a National Identity**

In its search for a unifying identity, the novel strives to demonstrate that an Irish identity does not necessitate a Catholic (or middle-class) identity or preclude a Protestant one. Thus at the beginning of the novel, race is introduced to show that, although they constitute a class, the Anglo-Irish gentry are of mixed races, Irish and English, and thus they have a claim to Irishness.<sup>1</sup> There are few representations of race per se in this novel,<sup>2</sup> but the question of race is important when the narrator strives to support the Anglo-Irish claim to an Irish identity not simply as the consequence of their situation in Irish history, but because they are Irish both by blood and by their claim to have contributed to the welfare of the Irish people. Major Dick asks:

How many Anglo-Irish great-great-grandfathers have not raised these monuments [the Big Houses] to their English forbears, and then, recognizing their obligations to their Irish mothers' ancestry, have filled them, gloriously, with horses and hounds, and butts of claret, and hungry poor relations . . . ? (13)

Later, at the point of his final departure from Ireland, Major Dick claims, "'I've got Brian Boroihme in my pedigree'" (260).

Also, in this novel, nationality and the meaning of Irishness are examined. Enraged by his financial difficulties, Major Dick reiterates his services to Ireland and adds, "'I declare to God I feel I don't know which I hate worst, the English Government, that pitches its friends overboard to save its own skin, or my own countrymen, that don't know the meaning of the word gratitude!'" (210). Despite his situation, he still regards the Irish, not the English, as his "countrymen," and he considers Ireland, not England, as his country: "'Wait till you've been for thirty years doing your best for your property and your country.'" The novel demonstrates that Major Dick fails to realize that the blame for his tragic fall cannot be attached to the Irish people or to the British Government alone. His demise results from his own poor judgement, his stupidity, and his inability to adapt, weaknesses that are represented as being typical of his class. Furthermore, his financial insolvency is also the consequence of the actions of his nephew, the absentee landlord, Larry Coppinger. Race is not represented here as the divisive construct. As we shall see, religion is constantly represented as dividing "the Irish" and represented

as the antithesis of the unifying construct of nationality although class constantly subverts that unifying construct.

Although the narrator strives to represent the Anglo-Irish Major as objectively as possible and as being ultimately responsible for his own fate, pity if not sympathy emerges from the narrator's description. Major Dick is a typical Anglo-Irishman, (he could be Martin Ross's father): "soldier, sportsman, loyalist." His attitude to Ireland is recreated in his eldest son, who like "his father before him, . . . disliked change" (28) and who asks, "'what's wrong with Ireland?'"(29). In Mount Music, the Major represents the older Anglo-Irish generation, and he is depicted as blind, ignorant, "stupid" (177), unable or unwilling to change or to adapt to the rapidly changing economic and political situation. His gradual decline and sudden financial collapse are charted in detail and become the main focus of his representation. His inconveniences are parodied: the loss of his men's scarlet hunting coats and "other like humiliations" (48), debts to the butcher and to the vintner (58). He is not a particularly well-developed character, but rather, as the narrator admits, a "type" (11) whose fate reflects that of many landlords in 1903:

The common lot of Irish landlords, and Pterdoctyli, was upon him, and he was in process of becoming extinct. It was his fate to see his income gradually diminishing, being eaten away . . . by successive Acts of Parliament . . . . The opinion of very old, and intolerant, and

indignant peers cannot always be taken seriously, but it is surely permissible to feel a regret for kindly, improvident Dick Talbot-Lowry, his youth and his income departing together, and the civic powers that he had once exercised, reft from him. (156)

The narrator's attitude is ambivalent: "When his hounds went, old age came" (182); sympathy merges with ridicule: "Poor old King Canute, with the tide by this time well above the tops of his hunting-boots" (260). But Dick's generation cannot be forgiven for its misreading of the historical situation: "his contribution to constructive politics had ended. He and his generation, reactionary to a man, instead of attempting to ride the waves of the rising tide, subscribed their guineas to construct breakwaters that were pathetic in their futility" (156-57). Despite its "reactionary" stance and consistent with the plot of Mount Music, only one specific generation is condemned, and not the class as a whole. Paradoxically, on the eve of his departure from Ireland, Major Dick gains an identity that validates his Irishness and integrates his identity with that of his tenants: he becomes an emigrant, an exile from Ireland.

In contrast to Major Dick, whom the narrator struggles to include in the hegemony of Irishness, is the successful, prosperous, and ambitious Dr. Mangan. Throughout Major Dick's decline, there have been murmurings that rents are being withheld and that "'Papa's having botheration with our people--'" (126). However, it is Mangan, not the "people,"

who directly benefits from the Talbot-Lowrys' loss. Mangan represents the Irish, Catholic, middle-class whose representatives are poised to assume the leadership of the county. Mangan, therefore, is glowingly depicted as an example of "the national character" possessing "power of sympathy, good-nature, intuition, adroitness, discernment of character, and a gift for taking every man in his humour" (51), but he is also described racially as "a type sufficiently common among southern Irishmen, with thick, strong-growing black hair, a large, black moustache, and heavy brows" (50). The novel, however, struggles to authorize Mangan's racial representation because Mangan is now the dominant national character.

### **Two Patriarchs**

While the construction of the female gender is only of minor importance in Mount Music, the construction of the patriarchs as figures of authority, particularly as that construction effects the women of the family, reveals the differences between the Mangans and the Talbot-Lowrys. The novel endeavors to present the Catholic, middle-class patriarch as sympathetically as possible, and, once again, it appears to succeed. The doctor's marriage is the only one to be described in any detail, and the affection and fidelity, even the desire, that exist between this couple seem genuine. In their last scene together, on the eve of their daughter's



arranged marriage to the Anglo-Irish Larry Coppinger, Mangan "looked at her with indulgent fondness, laughing at her, and she gazed back at him with her heart in her eyes, and thought him the king of men" (321). The Mangan household is a place of music, laughter, warmth, kindness, hospitality, hot jars, whiskey and champagne, a home where the expression "hot as love" is openly used (67).

By comparison, Mount Music seems a cold and formal environment: "Major Dick and Lady Isabel were sincerely attached to one another" (15). Marriages here are similar to those depicted in The Real Charlotte where upper-class women are again represented as commodities. Lady Isabel is the daughter of a wealthy English Earl: "she brought with her to Mount Music twenty thousand golden sovereigns, which are very nice things, and Lady Isabel herself was indisputably a nice thing too" (13-14). As is to be expected, marriages are arranged on the basis of land ownership. Major Dick's aunt was "'married off,' as was the custom of her period, at the age of seventeen, to elderly Anthony Coppinger" (17). And attitudes have not changed: Major Dick remarks of his eldest son, "'He'll have to marry money'" (184).

The Mangan patriarchy, however, is deceptively carefree and unauthoritarian. Although Mangan presumably married for love, his wife is, nevertheless, his "favourite slave" (314). Local gossip suggests Mrs. Mangan was his Dublin cook. Both

Mangan and Talbot-Lowry are thus represented as patriarchs and figures of authority ruling over their wives and children. Lady Isabel is only "an echo" of her husband "with no more backbone than the shape of a blancmange" (269) and takes "his part, quite frequently, against the children" (15). Although the Mangans themselves appear unhindered by such considerations as the transference of property, their children will not be permitted such freedom. Indeed, Mangan's aim to marry both his children to Anglo-Irish landowners activates the main plot.

While both Mangan and Talbot-Lowry are represented as patriarchs attempting to control their children's future, both patriarchs have varying degrees of success in imposing authority over their children--particularly their daughters. That future especially implies the transfer of land and the security of their own particular class interests as well as the continuity of their race. Once again, as we have seen in The Real Charlotte, resistance to patriarchal authority and the desire for personal autonomy assert themselves far more clearly among the middle-classes as they represent a force for a change. Mangan's daughter, Tishy, is "a young woman of dauntless courage" who fears only her father and her parish priest. She is represented throughout as a woman possessing power over men; eventually, she exercises that power over her own father as, "alight with mutiny," she defies his

authority. Tishy elopes with the man she desires, leaving her fiancé, Larry Coppinger, on the eve of their wedding and freeing him to marry his true love, his cousin, Christian Talbot-Lowry. Ironically, by following her own father's example, Tishy also undermines the established authority and, by so doing, paradoxically, subverts her father's ambitions and those of his class. Thus Mangan will not be able to assert his authority as does Talbot-Lowry. Furthermore, while the novel applauds Tishy and grants her desired autonomy as a woman, it does not enable her or her class to replace the Anglo-Irish in a dominant position of authority.

By contrast, Talbot-Lowry's daughters are submissive. Judith, the eldest, despite her strong will, "makes a depressingly satisfactory marriage" (181), and Christian, the main female protagonist, true to her upbringing, refuses Larry's offer of marriage to placate her father's bigotry: "Lady Isabel was of the school that inculcated self-denial for its daughters" (181). The dutiful Christian is unable to resist her father's wishes; she is, therefore, unable to fulfill her own personal desires, and she is equally unable to cross the religious divide, marry her Catholic cousins, and subvert the status quo.

### **The Class Struggle for the Land**

Although it appears that the Catholic Mangans are sympathetically represented, once Mangan comes into conflict with Major Talbot-Lowry over the question of land, and the status quo is seriously threatened, the author's sympathy for Dr. Mangan evaporates. Thus, once religion overlaps with the control of property and class issues, particularly with the ownership of land, tensions and divisions occur undermining the possibilities of an inclusive national identity. Somerville's attempt to render Dr. Mangan likable is constantly subverted by his own actions and by his dubious motives. An excellent summary of Dr. Mangan's characterization is provided by Robinson (151-52); but, although she notes similarities between him and Charlotte Mullen, she fails to highlight the contradictions that exist in his representation.

Because of his size, the narrator explains that "[h]e was like an elephant in his hugeness, and suppleness, his dangerousness, his gentleness" (114). Certainly, the reader cannot forget that he is a kind, warm man, for these qualities constantly emerge, and, therefore, one quickly overlooks the dangerous element of his nature since nothing overt in his behavior warrants this fear. He is a good husband and father, a loyal friend--like Charlotte Mullen--always at hand

when people are most vulnerable, and a conscientious doctor who loses his life visiting a patient. He is a well-established, prosperous citizen of Cluhir, ambitious for himself and his children. Unlike Charlotte Mullen, however, his ambition does not seem to be driven by passion or jealousy. He is, for example, totally at ease at Mount Music, treating his patient, Major Dick, almost indulgently, but making no effort to fit in.

Yet Mangan never deludes himself about his own importance or his position within Irish society, particularly his relations with the Talbot-Lowrys. He is acutely aware of their view of him. Early in the novel, we are told: "He was in no hurry, and he had often had occasion to agree with Milton (though he had been quite unaware of so doing) in thinking that they also serve who stand and wait" (53). Perhaps the narrator is suggesting that the doctor, unlike the Major, possesses a sense of history, enough to know that history is on his side; consequently Mangan has the patience, assurance, and self-confidence that accompany the knowledge of his future ascendancy. The middle-class revolution in Ireland and the demise of the landed gentry is inevitable although the novel refuses to accept that inevitability.

Mangan's ambition and opportunism reflect the historical moment. In a related series of events, he convinces his land-agent son, Barty, to sell Larry Coppinger's land at a

very low price, thus devaluing the Major's property. His real motives emerge only at the end when this "national character" is revealed as having manipulated and deceived everyone for his own profit. Because of Major Dick's mounting debts, Dr. Mangan, offers a loan; the Major agrees and proposes, almost offhandedly, to mortgage Mount Music as security. "It was, of course, a purely nominal affair--but still--what about a mortgage on the house and demesne? How would that do? The doctor thought it would do very well" (113). Thus the doctor effectively becomes the owner of Mount Music.

Despite Mangan's description as a type, he also seems to resist the class with which he is identified. As Georg Lukacs has shown, "the way in which a character of a novel is typical, the manner in which he represents social trends is . . . complex" as is "the relation of the individual to the social group to which he belongs and which he represents" (140). Mangan's views, for example, differ from the local hotelier: "He was quite aware that his friend, Hallinan, and he regarded the Talbot-Lowrys from a different standpoint" (58). In the divisive confrontation over the rights of hunters to cross farm land, the doctor is silent (211); similarly, during the local election, his allegiance is uncertain, yet he has been quietly canvassing the clergy on Larry Coppinger's behalf. We are also told that he is a

slave to his church: "his head was not crowned with the bald benevolence that an elephant wears, but seated on his neck was a mahout, and the mahout was Father Greer" (114). Yet despite this accusation, Greer states that Mangan is "so fond of Protestants!" (174), and, indeed, he plans to marry his son to a Protestant.

Dr. Mangan's epitaph is also contradictory. His drowned body is discovered by Evans, the Mount Music butler, who recognizes him by his "fur-collared coat." Evans' cruel and bitter words distract the reader from their content, "'Well, ye wanted Mount Music!' he said, at last. 'How d'ye like it now ye've got it?'" (327) and deflect the reader's attention from the dead Mangan. Furthermore, his obituary remains ambiguous: "A jury of his peers would have approved him in his every action" (328). (Whom the narrator considers to be "his peers" is unclear.) The Doctor has not yet been laid to rest. Following his father's death, Barty Mangan reveals the full extent of Mangan's deal with the Major to his friend Larry:

"Anyway, whatever was between them, the Major gave my father the title-deeds of this house and the demesne in security for what he had borrowed. My father has them now, I mean," he corrected himself, "they're in my office. He said that they were for me--he as good as gave them to me. . . . You needn't think I had anything to do with it," he muttered, . . . "or ever will!" he added as if to himself. (336)

Gradually, the kind, warm, patient Doctor is thoroughly discredited, and, by implication perhaps, also the class which he represents. Again Lukacs writes, "the typical quality of a character in a novel is very often only a tendency which asserts itself gradually, which emerges to the surface only by degrees out of the whole" (140).

Yet the author still achieves a balance in her representations of the two patriarchal families. Barty Mangan himself is completely exonerated; his adoration of both Christian and Larry and his belief in their moral superiority (a belief we encountered before between Francie and Christopher Dysart) is sufficient evidence of Barty's innocence. In this moment of "horror," however, Larry's behavior now becomes questionable as he fails to separate the identities of father and children, condemning them equally. "'Thank God, I'm out of it!' "It" meant marriage with the daughter and sister of men who could do such things" (336). Although, typically, no one appears completely innocent or guilty, neither of Mangan's children will fulfill his ambitions and marry into the Anglo-Irish gentry class, nor will his descendants inhabit Mount Music. In the end, both Doctor Mangan and Major Dick are excluded from the Ireland the younger generation had hoped to build, and the prejudices and ambitions of the parents obstruct a possible union between the two families. Although the narrator strives to represent



the Catholic family sympathetically, class prejudice towards the doctor is expressed in the representation of his desire for the possession of land. Thus, the novel supports the status quo, as religion appears to subvert a national identity. In addition, this novel seems to assume that the Catholic middle-class want to replace the Anglo-Irish in positions of social prominence rather than to create their own, new, identities of social status.

### **Subverting Class Divisions**

In Mount Music, it is the middle-class doctor and the progressive, young Anglo-Irish landlord who seek to blur the divisions between classes and religions. Both are differently motivated, however. Mangan acts purely out of self-interest while Larry Coppinger is concerned with "The Spirit of the Nation." Nevertheless, whatever their motives, they resist their own narrow class identity and strive towards a more inclusive view of Irishness. Their actions and desires, however, are firmly resisted by representatives from both the peasant and gentry classes. Frederica Coppinger's class attitude towards religion and her nephew's Catholicism is established in the following passages and that same position is then reiterated and clarified by her dairy woman, Mrs. Twomey:

Frederica was as good a Christian--in some ways probably a better one--as might have been found in the white

chapel, but it was impossible for her not to feel, what was, indeed, felt, with a singular mixture of satisfaction and disapproval, by the majority of the white chapel's congregation, that Larry's parent had, socially, been ill-advised when they "made a Roman of him." In the creed of Mary Twomey, and her fellows, it was only in conformity with natural law in the spiritual world that ginthry should go to church, and the like of herself to chapel. She, no more than Frederica, could subdue the feeling of incongruity imparted by the fact of Master Larry and herself worshipping together . . . Mary Twomey, and her fellows, would have indignantly repudiated the idea of taking service with one of their own church. "No! Thank God! I never sank to that!" There was no question of religion in it. Merely of fitness. (132)

Both Frederica and Mary are in complete agreement that it is against the "natural law" for people of different classes to associate as equals as they would if they attended the same church. The implication is, of course, that the spiritual world should reflect the natural world, and that classes--and, therefore, in the Irish context, religions also--should be kept separate. Thus the narrator also explains (to her English audience) that "in the Irish countryside it is the extremes that touch, and that there is a sympathy and an understanding between the uppermost and the lowest strata of Irish social life, which is not extended, by either side, to the intervening one" (88). Just as Mrs. Twomey wishes to distance herself from the middle classes and would not "take service" with a Roman Catholic (such as Dr. Mangan), Frederica is far closer to the peasant class than she is to the middle class: "Thus it was that Frederica could, and did

converse with her work-people and her peasant neighbours with freedom and an implicit confidence in their good breeding, that it is to be feared she was incapable of extending to Larry's new acquaintances in Cluhir" (88), the "new acquaintances" being, of course, Dr. Mangan and his family. The narrator tries to explain "this sympathy" between the peasants and the Anglo-Irish by their "mutual engrossment in outdoor affairs," but the narrator finally settles for "the certainty of both sides, that the well-bred, even the chivalrous point of view, will govern on both sides" (88).

We can explain this anomaly by the fact that Frederica's relationship with her "work-people" was certainly not egalitarian--an understanding shared by both parties for many generations. This, however, was not the case with the relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the Mangans. Although they realize they are being snubbed, Mangan and his daughter, Tishy, deal with their counterparts among the Anglo-Irish as equals. Significantly, however, the narrator's viewpoint concerning the idealized relationship between landlord and peasant, between Protestant and Catholic, is contradictory. An earlier comment states that "[t]enants and tradesmen bowed down before them [the gentry], with love sometimes, sometimes with hatred, never with indifference" (11). That this idealized relationship is changing and being eroded can perhaps be explained by the

increasing presence and power of the Catholic, nationalist, middle classes.

The tensions and contradictions that exist among the classes in Ireland at this time and which are also represented amongst individuals are best illustrated by a hunting scene, which in Somerville and Ross often presents a microcosm of Irish society. Christian Talbot-Lowry's horse has fallen as a result of strung fences,<sup>22</sup> and when the severity of the horse's injury is discovered by Donovan, who has also bred the horse, the following incident occurs:

'Staked she is!' roared Donovan; 'that's what I mean! Look at what's coming from her!'

He broke into a torrent of crude statements, made, if possible, more horrible by curses.

Larry struck him on the mouth with his open hand.

'Shut your mouth! Remember the lady!'

Michael Donovan took the blow as a dog might take it, and without more resentment.

Christian quickly put her hand on his shoulder.

'Don't mind, Michael. Let me see what has happened to her--' (200)

Larry's action seems strangely out of character; at least this side of his nature has not been evident before because the reader has only seen him with the Mangans or with his own family. Perhaps because of his Catholicism Larry is different from the other Anglo-Irish in the novel. He views Irish history from a nationalist perspective, and he stands as a Nationalist candidate. His violence towards the farmer, Donovan, however, is stereotypical behavior of landlords in nineteenth-century Irish fiction.<sup>23</sup> Donovan's class position

is uncertain. He is a farmer, but that description covers a range of classes and interests as the narrator is aware (252). He may be "one of those sound and sensible and thrifty farmers who are the strength of Ireland" (253). Certainly, he cannot be a poor farmer since he owns and raises horses. Nevertheless he is Larry's "inferior" in terms of class even though he and Larry undoubtedly attend the same chapel. That he is an older man makes Larry's behavior even more reprehensible. Thus his behavior can only be explained as an act of "chivalry," protecting Christian from Donovan's "horrible curses." Christian herself, however, seems unaffected by Donovan's language. She and Donovan are totally focused on the fate of her horse.<sup>13</sup> Donovan's dismay is evident: "'Oh, my lovely little mare!'" (199) he exclaims.

The hunt is described here as an event that "'brings all classes together'" (161), but the nature of the hunt was also changing, reflecting the social and political changes in rural Ireland. Farmers' mounting opposition to the hunters' destructive sport created new tensions between and among the interested parties. Thus the Carmodys string their fences with wires. Clearly this incident demonstrates how "the sympathy and understanding" that existed among those who are "engrossed in outdoor affairs" is being undermined.

Not only are the different class interests between hunters and farmers revealed in this passage, but the farmers, too, are divided amongst themselves and have contradictory interests and allegiances. Donovan is obviously prosperous since he owns horses for pleasure and rides with the hunt. After the accident, Larry wants to pursue one of Carmody's men, and Donovan agrees, "'Go after him, if ye like, the bloody ruffian!'" (199). Larry also blames Donovan for not stopping the "'the brute.'" Clearly, Donovan understands the situation, so he may be liable. When Christian does not go home following his vague warnings, Donovan relies on a higher authority: "'Maybe He'll mind her, so!'" The narrator adds: "The shifting of responsibility brought some ease of mind" (196). But Donovan is not to blame. When Larry questions Christian about the burning of the "gorse," another action on the part of the farmers to deter the fox hunters, she says little. The narrator adds knowingly, "In Ireland people learn to be silent on a very imperceptible hint" (196).

In the hunting incident, Larry and Christian are not altogether blameless either. One displays ignorance of the situation in Ireland because of his prolonged absence abroad and the other fails to listen to the warnings of her people. Perhaps the arrogance of Christian's class position will not permit her to believe that her safety is threatened by local

farmers, people who might once have been her family's tenants. Christian had first been specifically warned about the location of the wires and "'black papishes'" (187) by Evans, the butler, but she dismisses his bigoted speech and calls him an "'Old lunatic!" Then her stable hand, Tommy, had shouted after her, "'Miss, mind out for the wire! . . . Carmody's fences are strung with it!'" (188). At the hunt, she is again warned in veiled terms by Michael Donovan: "'The fences from this out aren't too good at all'" (195). But Christian pays no heed. Finally she turns to her kinsman, "'Larry,' . . . do you think I ought to go back?' . . . Larry, having received a hasty sketch of the position, gives his advice with all the assurance of complete ignorance, 'Your father has the sporting rights--anyhow, I don't believe they'll stop you.'" (197). If Christian had listened to those with a knowledge of the countryside--Tommy, or Donovan, even Evans--rather than her cousin Larry, who simply relies on past "rights" and customs of a bygone time, Christian's horse, Nancy, beloved by both Christian and Donovan, would never have fallen.

The scene closes with Christian walking away to fetch Carmody's gun to put down her horse who is past saving. The allegorical implications for Ireland are obvious. In Mount Music, only a horse is slain; in An Enthusiast, the victim caught in the cross fire is the main protagonist. Perhaps

this incident more than any other in the novel illuminates Somerville's portrayal of the class divisions in Ireland. It is also one of the rare incidents or scenes in this novel in which religion (with the exception of Evans' remarks) is not mentioned although, as we shall see, it clearly underlies the class structure.

### **Representations of Catholics and Protestants**

As stated in the introduction, contrary to some other readings, this study shows that although Somerville's<sup>14</sup> representations of race and class, particularly class, are often biased, her religious representations consciously aim to be balanced and impartial. Furthermore, although Mount Music is a novel that focuses on religion, religious discussion that focuses on religion alone is very limited in the novel. Remarks such as "'I hope I'm not a bigot . . . but I thank God I'm not a Roman Catholic!'" (161) are fairly typical. Dr. Mangan exclaims, "'But there's no understanding of Protestants!'" (118). Although Larry's Catholicism is largely an accident of his birth and his schooling rather than the consequence of any real conviction (rather like his politics), he is wearied by the eternal question of religion in Ireland as he tells his friend, Barty Mangan, "'I hate England, of course, . . . but I must say I get sick of this eternal blackguarding of Catholics by Protestants, and



Protestants by Catholics--'" (103). Barty expresses similar sentiments in conversation with Christian, "'I wish to God! . . . that there was anny league or society in Ireland that would override class prejudice, and obliterate religious bigotry!'" (142). That Barty and Christian differ in class and religion and yet can speak so candidly to each other exemplifies both the tolerance that the narrator feels exists among the younger generation and the possibility of an end to sectarian divisions.

As expected in a Somerville novel, religion, like class, is not represented as a monolith, so there are considerable differences of belief and attitudes amongst the Protestant community. True to her name, Christian's Protestantism seems to be ecumenical. As a child she is even drawn to Catholicism. Noticing Larry's observance of the Angelus, she envies "his accredited salutation, making her feel something of the beauty, if not of holiness, of at least, the recognition that there were holy things in the world" (61). Christian, unlike the rest of her family, is a spiritual being, and at the age of sixteen

she had discovered her soul, and had discovered also, that it has been born on the farther side of the river of life from the souls of her brethren, and that although, for the first staged, the stream was narrow, and the way on one bank very like that on the other, the two paths were divided by deep water, and the river widened with the passing years. (154)

Two years later, when Larry discovers he has a soul, he asks Christian, "'Don't you feel being a Protestant is a bit --well--stodgy--and respectable--no sort of poetry?'" She replies, good-naturedly, "'I like stodge'" (125). But Christian's spiritual nature and her inclination towards Catholicism is not shared by her family or by other Protestants; Christian alone inhabits the borderlands between the two religions. Christian, attracted (like Oscar Wilde) to the "poetry" of the Roman Catholic ritual and liturgy, could be categorized as High Church, and her religious beliefs would differ from Catholics on papal infallibility, transubstantiation, and Marian doctrine.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, the Major is, on the whole, disinterested in matters of religion (27), and both Christian's parents overlook differences of religion when it is in their interest to do so. In his business dealings with Dr. Mangan, religion is no obstacle, "I'm all for toleration, and let the parsons fight it out among em! Busy men, like you and me, haven't time to worry about these affairs--we've other things to think about!" (97). Even in Ireland, business interests can erase differences of class and religion. Lady Isabel also views religion pragmatically. We learn from Evans, the butler, that she places convenience over matters of creed in household matters and prefers Catholic to Protestant servants because they are "'so easy to find'" (34). Presumably,

therefore, since they have such a laissez-faire attitude to religion, the Talbot-Lowrys would not object to a union between Larry and Christian. But religion alone is not the issue here; what will prove far more problematic is the question of Larry's politics (254-55).

Frederica Coppinger, in contrast to the Talbot-Lowrys, professes a quite different form of Protestantism. She is of "that school of Low Church Protestantism that makes more severe demands upon submission and credulity than any other, and yet more fiercely arraigns other creeds on those special counts" (87). The narrator continues to detail Frederica's Low Church beliefs; she believes in "Eternal Damnation" and that "the task of Creation was completed in a week" (87). No crucifix or icon would hang above her bed. The narrator, however, is always careful to maintain a balanced view of both religions, and, as we have seen in her representation of class, the narrator is also careful to represent the wide variations within the two denominations. The narrator's final analysis of Miss Coppinger's belief also includes a comparison with the other denomination: "her religious beliefs were only comparable, in their sincerity and simplicity, with those of the Roman Catholic poor people, whose spiritual prospects were to her no less black (theoretically) than were hers to them" (88).

The diction in this passage is particularly significant concerning the comparison of the two religions and their congregations. "Simplicity" describes Frederica's religious belief, yet "simplicity" certainly implies "naivete" which is synonymous with "credulity" and "gullibility." Furthermore, in its "simplicity," Frederica's belief is compared not to Roman Catholic belief generally, but specifically to the belief of "Roman Catholic poor people," "poor" meaning also uneducated. In other words, there is little difference between Frederica Coppinger's type of religion and that of her dairy woman. In making such a comparison between the similarity in beliefs or rather attitudes of two groups of people, the narrator has, in effect, erased differences of class and race, at least where ignorance and prejudice are concerned. Furthermore, the narrator, who is undoubtedly Somerville as we can see from the afterword, represents Catholicism in the same way that she represents Protestantism, not as a monolith but as a structure containing many variants. Larry and Dr. Mangan, for example, would not be included amongst the class of "Roman Catholic poor people," hence their ability to cross the sectarian divide.

The only character in the novel whose religious hatred or religious prejudice appears largely untainted by class or politics is Robert Evans, the Talbot-Lowry butler.<sup>12</sup> Evans has been at Mount Music since 1859 (33), the period of the

tenants rights agitation when the Irish gentry employed only Protestant indoor servants as a "safeguard against espionage" (34). Evans is always described as "a turkey-cock" (34), "sour and withered," (262); he "croak[s]" (187). We have already seen that Christian dismisses his warnings as the ravings of an "'Old lunatic!'" Larry believes Evans hates him: "'He's one of those damned Orangemen. . . . I bet old Evans would rather lose, any day than be 'linked in his might' with a Papist like you or me'" (102). Perhaps Larry's opinion is not unwarranted. Evans thinks of Larry as a "poisoned offspring" (34), "a Papist" (35). It is Evans who breaks the bad news to the Major that Larry is standing as the Nationalist candidate and who gloats at his master's reaction to Larry's arrival: "'Now me laddy-o!' he whispered, rubbing his hooked grey beak with one finger, and chuckling low and wheezily: 'now maybe! Me fine young Papist! Ye'll be getting your tay in a mug! Hot and strong!'" (264). Evans' speech is never clear, he croaks, or mutters, or whispers as if he knows that no one wants to listen to his words. Religious bigotry eventually intersects with class, and Evans inevitably associates Larry's religion and politics with the lower classes; hence his reference to "strong tea." Barty Mangan also senses this class bias in Evans. On his first visit to Mount Music, he notes that Evans "'kept an eye on me that was like a flame from a blow-pipe! You'd say he

thought I was going to steal the house!'" (102). Evans is also the only character, aside from the Catholic characters themselves, who habitually refers to Catholics as "Papists." When Evans finds the drowned body of Dr. Mangan, the final image of the butler is that of an embittered, hateful, and revengeful old man. He is, in fact, an isolated character and seems to be in the Malvolio tradition of stewards.

### **The Clergy**

In a novel that focuses on religion, it is not surprising that there are several portraits of clergymen. As Joyce pointed out, the Irish are, after all, "a priest-ridden race" (Portrait 37). Rather like Chaucer's clerics, whatever their individual characterizations, Somerville's clergy all share a marked lack of interest in matters spiritual, but the Catholic clergy are, without exception, all concerned with politics. Mr. Fetherstone, the Church of Ireland rector, is the least political and the most likable. Perhaps it is no accident that he is a carpenter by avocation. He pays little attention to Frederica's concerns about Larry's emerging nationalism, and his remedy is simple--"'Send him to Oxford'" (86). Most interestingly, he is

immensely respected and admired by the poor people of the parish (none of whom were included in his small and well-to-do congregation), the fact that he was what is known as "old stock," giving him a prestige among the poorer Roman Catholics, that they would have denied to St. Peter. He shared with Major Tollbooth-Lorry the

position of consultant in feuds, and relieving officer  
in distress . . . (85-86)

Once again, the narrator stresses how religious differences are supported by class, and she seems to imply that in some ways the "poorer" Catholics are closer to Fetherstone than to their own clergy who, in this novel, are decidedly middle-class. Mr. Fetherstone's popularity and respect among the Catholic population may also result from the unpleasant nature of the Catholic parish priest, Father Greer. Barty admits that he has "'no great fancy for Father Greer'" (103), and Larry says that Mrs. Twomey "'loathes'" (103) him. The clerics often appear dining with their prosperous parishioners. Greer is described as having "the wide, brains-carrying forehead of a fox, as well as a fox's narrow jaw" (116). The fox imagery is continued throughout the passage as Greer chews on Mrs. Mangan's roast goose.

Greer and Mangan disagree about Larry Coppinger's association with Protestants and the scene contrasts the priest's condemnation of Larry--"'I may say that I regard with anxiety a too great freedom, what I may call an unrestrained intercourse, between members of the two churches'" (119)--with Mangan's defence of Larry. (Father Greer's separatist views are balanced by the prejudices of the Rev. Cotton's wife [166].) Mangan's experience, like Larry's, is not restricted to Ireland; he has spent considerable time in

England. When Barty also expresses the desire to continue his education in England, the priest quickly substitutes national allegiance with religious allegiance, having failed to appeal to the latter: "'I may say that there is a belief among certain classes that no one is properly educated without they've been sent to England. I thought my friend Barty was a better Irishman than it seems he is!'" (120). It is no accident that since he is discussing matters of patriotism and Irishness, this educated priest slips into Anglo-Irish dialect to underline his argument.

The clergy generally are represented as being responsible for the religious divisions in Ireland. During the election campaign, Larry and Barty discuss the state of Ireland. Larry, who "knew no more of Ireland than a boy can learn in his school holidays" (277), has come to the conclusion that "the single element of discord that remained ever unchanged was Religion" (277). Furthermore, both he and Barty agree to "lay all the blame for all the malice and uncharitableness at the door of the clerk of the two creeds." This is perhaps a simplistic explanation of the problems as an editorial comment notes that this was "a comprehensive decision, and a consoling one, from the point of view of two laymen" (278). Yet the Roman Catholic clergy possess considerable influence in the political arena. In the class war between the Major and his tenants, the clergy are



directly involved. An unnamed priest chairs a meeting of tenants threatening to boycott Mount Music (242). Later we hear that a priest had accompanied a delegation of the tenants to the Big House.

To credit the clergy with such influence may not be historically accurate, however. J. H. Whyte writes: "For practical purposes one need not pursue a study of the electoral influence of the clergy beyond the year 1900" although "some priests helped Sinn Fein to victory in the general election of 1918" (259). But this fits the time-frame of the novel and so would suggest that the representation of the clergy is factual. Dr. Mangan canvases both priests, Sweeney and Greer, seeking their support of Larry's nomination as the Nationalist candidate. Mangan's main concern is to prevent a relationship developing between Larry and Christian, one that Mangan knows could not flourish if Larry were elected as a Nationalist M. P. Father Greer has already admitted that he "'greatly deplore[s] mixed marriages'" (230), but in the end, Greer does not support Larry: "'The clergy is agin him!'" ; hence the people do not support Larry, and he loses the election. Although the priests fail to advance Larry's political career, viewing him suspiciously as an "English Catholic," their abstention indirectly facilitates the possibility of Larry's marrying Christian and entering into a "mixed marriage." As a pragmatic young woman

points out, the Catholic clergy will hardly obstruct Larry's engagement to Christian since "'the priests won't want to fall foul of anyone with as much money as Larry!'" (243). Undoubtedly the novel's biased portrayal of the Catholic clergy and their political preoccupation represents the fears of the southern Protestants that "Sinn Fein . . . seemed poised to launch a two-pronged attack on the identity of the Protestant people, threatening them with subjection to Gaelic culture as well as to Rome rule" (Lee, Ireland 38). It should not be forgotten, of course, that Somerville was not the only Irish writer of this period to accuse the Catholic clergy of meddling in politics. Simon Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man claims that he is not anti-clerical provided the priests "'don't meddle in politics" (32). Once again, the significance or interpretation of a representation seems to reside not so much in the image itself as in the identity of the image-maker. As Dante notes of the conversation around the Dedalus Christmas table, "'The blackest Protestant in the land would not speak the language I have heard this evening'"! (35).

### **Religion and Class Politics**

Differences and tensions between classes can be expressed without reference to religion, but, with very few exceptions, the reverse does not apply. Indeed religious

objections are rarely voiced unrelated to other concerns. Usually they are related to the construction of class, nationality, and politics, and to the past and future governance of Ireland. Religion and its expression in class terms is first raised in Mount Music by the Major on the issue of Larry's Catholicism: "'But look here, Frederica,' he said, putting down his cup and saucer, with a crash, on the high mantelpiece, 'you don't mean to tell me that the boy has to go to Mass with the servants--on the cook's lap, I suppose--on the outside car! Good heavens!'" (25). Undoubtedly there is an element of humor in the Major's exaggerated outrage.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Frederica, the Major's cousin, is adamant because "she had a sense of fair-play that was proof against her zeal as an Irish Church-woman." Thus she says she "'cannot possibly interfere with Larry's religion'" (25). However, as the issue of "mixed marriages" will demonstrate, objections to such marriages are never based on religious prejudice but are also clearly grounded in class prejudice.

The term "mixed marriages" denotes a marriage between a Catholic and a "non-Catholic" and should not bear any class or racial connotations (although this may not be true in the historical context of this novel). Two such marriages are proposed in Mount Music; neither actually materializes although one is certainly strongly intimated in the concluding words of the novel. This marriage is between Larry

Coppinger and his cousin, Christian Talbot-Lowry, the two young, Anglo-Irish protagonists in the novel. These two characters might well represent Somerville's idealized vision of a future Ireland: aristocratic, Irish, religiously unbiased and adaptable to the changing social and economic times. One other mixed marriage, that of Larry's parents, predates the novel's time-frame. Larry's father had been an officer in India when he met and married Theresa Quinton, "a member of an ancient Catholic family in the North of England, and an ardent member of her Church" (17). When Larry was born, he was, "of course," educated as a Roman Catholic, and, when orphaned, this education continued, his father having converted to Catholicism (25). It is important to identify the nature of Larry's and his mother's English Catholicism and to differentiate it from Irish Catholicism. Historically, a distinction is often made between English Catholics and Irish Catholics as it is in this novel (117, 175) although, in this case, the referent is the same person, Larry Coppinger! It must be stressed that Theresa Quinton was "of an ancient Catholic family from the North of England," which means that she was of an old, aristocratic family which had not converted during the English Reformation. The origin of her Catholicism, therefore, is Anglo-Saxon and aristocratic, not Celtic and lower-class. Thus in the world of Mount Music, Larry and Christian's union is possible because

they differ from each other only in matters of religion; they are of the same class and race. By contrast, Larry's engagement to Tishy Mangan never happens: although Larry and Tishy are both Catholic, they are separated by class and race. Religious differences between Larry and Christian, untouched by political issues, do not seem to be problematic.

Religious tolerance, however, is often voiced but not practiced, "mixed marriages" being a case in point. What emerges, in Mount Music, is that the Anglo-Irish objections to a "mixed marriage" derive from Larry's class politics, not from his religion. Frederica's initial attitude to young Larry's religious education is generous: "She had a sense of fair play that was proof against her zeal as an Irish Church-woman" (25), and thus she insists that Larry be educated as a Catholic in a Catholic school. Later, however, she objects violently to his close association with the Mangans: "'these second-rate, Nationalistic, Roman Catholics--!'" (85). Larry's relationship with his aunt cools during the course of the novel, and later a "barrier of ice" (169) comes between them as a result of his politics, not his religion. Although aunt and nephew appear to reach an understanding, Frederica will not attend Larry's marriage to Tishy Mangan. The same development is also evident in the Major's changing attitude to Larry's religion. The Major is so horrified by, his nephew's proposal to his daughter, Christian, that he suffers

a heart attack: "'I'd rather see her dead in her coffin than married to--'" (266). The Major's objections are many as Larry explains: "'he began to abuse me like a madman! My religion, my politics, my treachery to my class'" (267). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, religious enmity reflects political conflict. In attempting to forge a national identity and in attempting to find a place for himself within a united Ireland, Larry has succeeded only in further fragmenting his own class.

Larry's politics have constantly been merged with his Catholicism, and it is his politics--politics which are regarded by his family as a betrayal of his class--that have caused him to become alienated from them. His politics, however, rather like his religion, have not been well thought out, but he is supported throughout by his friend, Barty Mangan, who is also an enthusiast and a romantic. Barty is Ireland's priest:

Where Ireland and Irish politics came into question, some deep spring of sentiment and enthusiasm in him was touched, and all the force that he was capable of became manifest. All the strength and tenacity that were in him were concentrated in the cause of Nationalism; Ireland was his religion, and he felt himself to be one of her priesthood. (245)

He follows in the tradition of Pearse and De Valera--a tradition which often includes martyrdom, an element to be developed in An Enthusiast. Likewise, as a child, Larry had read The Spirit of the Nation, a collection of political

ballads written by Thomas Davis and other contributors, many of them from the Young Ireland Movement so that "his young soul burned with hatred of England" (31). A new edition of these ballads had appeared in 1882. Mount Music opens in the 1890s, so the edition would have been readily available to the fictionalized Larry.<sup>40</sup> Davis was Anglo-Irish and Protestant, but he was joined in his political activities by two Catholics, Charles Duffy and John Dillon. As Seamus Deane observes, "Davis believed 'culture' to be the central agency in the formation of a new politics" (Short History 76). Furthermore, he believed that "the conflicting interests of the peasantry and the Ascendancy" would be united through education to create a new understanding. Deane adds, "He was, in fact, inventing the symbolism of a complete 'spiritual' nationhood" (77), and more importantly for our purposes: "the war of tenant against landlord . . . was the real conflict of which Davis's writings were no more than a symbolic resolution" (77). Moreover, Davis had told the young Protestant students of Trinity College, "Gentleman, you have a country" (qtd. in Boland 181). Throughout Mount Music there are references to "the Spirit" or the "Spirit of the Nation" although Davis is never mentioned, and, in some cases, "the Spirit" is parodied and stands for religious intolerance; thus the novel subverts the very construct of Davis's "Spirit."

Fired by his reading of Young Irelander poetry, Larry realizes that Catholics and Protestants must act together. As he discusses the tenants with Christian, he remarks, "'the Irish are the finest people, and the worst governed!'" (128), adding brazenly that he is a Home Ruler, "'If not a Republican'" (128). Consequently, he learns Irish (as does Christian) at a branch of the Gaelic League (142), joins the "Sons of Emmet," and is chosen as the next Nationalist candidate. Since these events are reported indirectly, Larry is never required to explain or defend his politics. But, like any enthusiast, Larry quickly becomes disillusioned and retreats to Paris to study art. When he returns four years later, Larry stands as the Nationalist candidate, despite his secret engagement to Christian. Barty envisions him as the new Parnell (249), and Larry's old ideals embodied in "The Spirit of the Nation" are revived: "his old dream that was coming true of standing for these people, of making their interests his, their welfare his care, moved him profoundly" (252). Larry's simple idealism, however, assumes the paternalistic aspirations of a reforming nineteenth-century landlord and rapidly cools. Thus he muses on the Dark Rosaleen who sends "brothers to fight each other" and who "will gather her sons under the sign of the Cross, and encourage them to hate one another for the love of God" (293).



In the representation of Larry, Somerville is beginning to deal with the particularly problematic nature of national identity for the Anglo-Irish. Even Larry's religion does not seem to facilitate his integration into the new Ireland. In Mount Music, her aim, it seems, is to create a unifying national identity--an inclusive identity, which might exist if religious differences were erased--and an identity which would include Dr. Mangan as well as Mrs. Twomey, and Larry and Christian. But she fails because in the Ireland of the early twentieth century, religious differences were still supported by class differences. In order to serve the country that he calls his, Larry has had to renounce his class, his family, and the woman he loves, all of whom would, nevertheless, also identify themselves as belonging to the one country--Ireland. Yet, because Larry differs from them in his religion, and because that religious difference expresses itself primarily in terms of class and class politics, his identity in the eyes of others--his family, his "people"--has become obscured. Now Larry belongs to the Mangans. As is often the case in Somerville and Ross, his political and psychological situation is mirrored in the world of the hunt: two young hounds "lumbered after Larry's quick foot" then "sitting down abruptly and unpremeditatedly, and watching with deep dubiety the departing form of their escort, as though a sudden and shattering doubt of his

identity had paralysed them" (206). Clearly, Larry can no longer be recognized by his own; he has become other.

In the end, however, Larry does not become completely other, and he is not fully included in the Mangan family. His marriage to Tishy is canceled at the last moment, and his relationship with Barty inevitably changes. Moreover, Frederica and the Talbot-Lowrys have gone, and Larry finds himself completely alone on his wedding morning. His isolated position on the borderlands is shared by Christian who, having been left behind in Mount Music, must complete "her work of destruction" (317) and "the obliteration of her past life" (312).

Christian embodies Larry's situation as she literally destroys her own family's history and the record of a past way of life which has become meaningless:

An immense fire of logs and turf blazed in the hall fire-place, a funeral pyre, on which Christian cast one basketful after another of letters, papers, ball-cards, hunt cards, pamphlets, old school-room books, stray numbers of magazines, all the accumulated rubbish that life . . . strews in its trail; all valueless. (312)

At night alone, in the storm she is fearless. As the narrator explains, "She had always lived on the borderland." (314). However, her existence "on the borderland" must also include her existence between her obliterated past and her uncertain future, the ambivalence of her religious inclinations, as well as the ambiguous nature of her identity as an

Anglo-Irish woman living on the brink of the creation of a new Ireland where her history will soon become "valueless."

### **Conclusion**

Mount Music is a relatively optimistic novel in its confrontation of religious sectarianism in Ireland, and it suggests that reconciliation and unity are possible. However, it cannot offer any solution to the religious problems because, although the novel demonstrates the class divisions which support the religious divisions, it fails to fully recognize them. Once again the middle-class are represented as ambitious and without integrity although there is the possibility that middle-class women would be able to provide leadership if they were given the opportunity. The Anglo-Irish are represented as failures. Even the young energetic Larry Coppinger fails as a leader through his inability to understand Ireland. His education and absence from Ireland make him an outsider, and, furthermore, he fails to gain the trust and the support of the Catholic population. Larry's desire to lead is still the same paternalistic Anglo-Irish desire to control. The novel ends indecisively; nothing has been resolved.

An Enthusiast

Two years after the publication of Mount Music, Somerville published another novel, An Enthusiast (1921), which deals directly with the contemporary Irish political situation. It is a fictionalized account of life in rural Ireland in 1920, yet many incidents in the novel reflect the events of that year: the first recruitment of the Black and Tans, Sinn Fein local elections, the railway men's strike and their refusal to transport troops, and, finally, the new Home Rule Bill which divided the country North and South and which provided for two parliaments, one in Dublin for the South, and the other in Belfast for the Six Counties. The title page credits Somerville as the single author, but it adds "in collaboration with Martin Ross." The preface makes no mention of Ross, but Somerville writes:

There is something arrogant, if not offensive, in an attitude of Impartiality, and to be strictly impartial is to be equally disliked by all sides. In trying to keep an even keel in very storm seas I have risked this disaster.

The people in this story all view Ireland from different angles, and each speaks for him or herself, and not for me.

On one point only we are all agreed--in love for the country that bore us, that ardent country in which the cold virtue of Impartiality is practically unknown.

No particular audience is addressed. It is a pessimistic and gloomy book in which the upper-classes are represented as

stupid, bitter, materialistic, and cruel; thinkers, reformers, and idealists fail, and the gombeenmen (money-lenders) and the gunmen on all sides take over. There are few moments of humor.

In spite of this, An Enthusiast is the only Somerville and Ross novel which aims to represent a hero even though he is a hero who fails miserably. Dan Palliser is typically Anglo-Irish, educated at Cambridge and a veteran of the first world war, yet he is also a graduate of an Irish Agricultural College. On the death of his father and against the advice of his family, he decides to remain in Ireland, to rent the Big House, and to farm the demesne himself. The novel follows his efforts at agricultural reform, his disillusionment with local politics, his affair with Lady Ducarrig, and his friendships with other idealists. Early in the novel, he is described as "a zealot and an enthusiast . . . a reformer" (13). On the surface, Dan Palliser may appear to resemble Larry Coppinger, but he differs greatly from Larry. He is a stronger, more serious, and much more isolated character. Furthermore, although he claims he has none (176), Dan's "politics," unlike Larry's, have been more carefully considered. He is "an idealist who is also a man of action" (56); and, tragically, because of his love of Ireland, he follows "in the succession of the martyrs" (57). In spite of his love for a married woman, Dan Palliser never

leaves Ireland; and, although he inevitably becomes involved in politics, like the agricultural reformer on whom he is modeled, Horace Plunkett, Dan believes that Ireland's problems must be solved through economics rather than politics. Inevitably, however, in the course of the novel, Palliser discovers that economics, even agriculture, cannot be divorced from politics.

### **Politics of the Upper Classes**

The discussion and representation of politics in An Enthusiast operates among three groups: the upper-class British and Anglo-Irish; the middle-class farmers and entrepreneurs; and the idealists whose representations cut across class, race and religion. Of course, none of these functions autonomously, and each alters and reflects the other with Dan interacting among and within all three, reflecting the increasing "modernisation of Irish society." As we have now come to expect from Somerville and Ross, the upper class are not presented as a homogeneous group. Dan's father, the late Colonel Palliser, is of the Old Stock, but his mother is from the North. Divergent national allegiances are immediately evident within the family and among their upper-class friends and acquaintances, differentiating those from the North and the South and reflecting the political situation in Ireland as a whole.

The differences between North and South are first parodied by a discussion on the "unreliability" of Irish servants. Mrs. Palliser begins, "'Even in my old home in the North . . . I can not say that the general standard approached the English--'" (40), "even" suggesting that the Northern values resemble those of England rather than those of Ireland. Her proposition is quickly rebutted by Miss De Vere who first stereotypes Northerners as having no sense of humor and continues, "'Give me Ireland! The intolerable nuisance of housekeeping is in some degree mitigated by the charms of conversation with your cook--'" (41). But the conversation quickly becomes overtly political with Lord Ducarrig providing the Unionist position:

'Take Sinn Fein, for instance. I consider 'Ourselves Alone' is a most praise-worthy sentiment, but I suppose Lord Ducarrig will give it quite another label!'

'I call it rank rebellion!' said Ducarrig, with an ugly look at the intrepid Miss de Vere. 'I'd like to send a fleet of aeroplanes to bomb Ireland from Slyne Head to Cape Clear.'

'Like rain to fall on the just and the unjust--even on Belfast?' jeered Katie de Vere, whose political opinions had a single rallying-point, which was opposition to those of the company she was in. (42)

A few moments later, Mrs. Palliser's brother, Admiral Caulfield joins in. "'This last news from Ulster is pretty lively, Ducarrig!' he called loudly down the table. 'There's been another blow-up, and a lot of the other side killed.' 'Thank God!' said Lord Ducarrig . . . ." (43).

Dan hears this "blood-thirsty" conversation wondering "how much longer he would have to bear it" (44). He is critical of his class from which he becomes increasingly estranged and who also regard him with suspicion; indeed mistrust and suspicion stalk most social relationships in this divided country. Amongst this group, Lord Ducarrig is the only character of any importance as far as the plot is concerned. All the other characters seated around the table simply comment and react to the unfolding events in the novel; the Anglo-Irish are no longer participants in Ireland's history.

Arnold Gilmore, Lord Ducarrig, a Protestant, upper-class unionist, is certainly one of Somerville and Ross's most repellent representations, and one wonders if Somerville could have created this character if she had been writing with Ross. Gilmore has held several Governorships in the East where he also "'made a pot o' money out of rubber'" (8). His title is not inherited, and we can assume from the text that he has earned it by putting down a rebellion in the colonies. He is not of the Old Stock; he owns no property in Ireland, but he wants to rent in "'Hell or Connaught,'" and he can afford to rent Monalour House, the Palliser family home. The representation of Gilmore demonstrates once more how the representation of gender is supported by class and



class politics so that the narrator's physical description of Gilmore reveals her distaste for his politics:

Lord Ducarrig's heavy-jowled, well-cut, eighteenth-century face, that would have been handsome but for its little eyes like a pig's, pale-lashed and pink, would glow with what he felt to be a patriot zeal, when Ireland, her climate, her people, and her politics, were placed on the block for execution . . . (39)

The Ducarrigs have been married for about ten years; there are no children, a child having died in infancy. Dan notices Gilmore's "large, well-shaped head, hairless, save for a thin reddish fringe, that hung like a garland from ear to ear across the back of his scalp, was darkly pink all over" (43), while Car's "gorgeous" appearance, on the other hand, leaves him "defenseless." Twenty-five years younger than her husband, Car is first described through Dan's eyes: "he couldn't feel sure she wasn't too good-looking to be as good as she looked" (46). The Ducarrigs are not a well-matched couple. She is talented musically, but her "'singing puts him to sleep,'" (83) and his politics bore her. A nurse in World War I, she had many friends, and she is alluring and captivating. She describes herself as "'a sort of mongrel--Irish and English--and a touch of Spanish too'" (75).

No further details are given of Car's family, her class, or her courtship. This is the first novel by Somerville and Ross that, in its representation of the Ducarrig marriage, seriously examines marital infidelity and represents the

hatred, humiliation, and violence that can result from an unsuitable match. Ducarrig seems to have chosen her as he might have purchased any object of his desire. We are told he "took her young and tender, from the schoolroom" and "she had not betrayed his judgement either in looks or in manners" (152), but she has disappointed him grievously by failing to produce an heir. It seems quite obvious that, from the start, it has been a loveless marriage of convenience on both sides: "That she had never made any effort or even pretence of affection for him had not troubled him long, since the bonds of matrimony were thereby loosened, and alternative objects of devotion entailed fewer responsibilities, and had the merit of variety" (152). For her part, "She never tolerated her husband more easily than when he was pre-occupied with another woman (and it may be added that this factor in domestic harmony was not often lacking)" (102).

In these descriptions, there is a sexual subtext which has not been present in other representations of marriages. She no longer considers Ducarrig as a husband; she lives in "Purgatory" (218). Car quite obviously encourages Dan's attentions, but she has had other flirtations: "she was a young woman who was accustomed to the position of being fallen in love with," and Dan interests her as an "unfamiliar" "type" (91). Ducarrig seems to desire her infidelity since such conduct would free him to remarry and produce an

heir. She, too, realizes his wish to be free of her: "'It would give Arnold such pleasure to pack me off to an asylum . . .'" (17). Although her sexual power resembles that of the young women in Mount Music, Car is never represented as possessing the courage or the freedom to act autonomously. She has been subjugated by her colonialist husband.

Despite his protestations, it is not difficult to believe that Ducarrig is a jealous man or that the couple's mutual antipathy could easily erupt into violence, the gender politics reflecting the mounting tensions of national politics. In the South, the Irish Volunteers, who have been reconstituted as the Irish Republican Army, begin to carry out guerrilla attacks on the police. Meanwhile the British have sent in the notorious Black and Tans, recruited from ex-British soldiers, to break up the I. R. A. In the North, the sectarian Ulster Volunteer Force has been established since 1913. Ireland is poised on the brink of civil war.

At a dinner party, Lady Ducarrig plays the part of the gracious hostess. When Ducarrig and his cronies, recently returned from a shooting party in the North, talk of going hunting in the nearby hills, Dan advises against it. All guns have been banned by the police, and the hills are now occupied by Sinn Feiners on the run as well as by the Black and Tans. Ducarrig becomes quickly angered at the thought of his hunting plans being disrupted, so he goads Dan by

implying that Dan has connections with Sinn Fein: "'Perhaps he can give us a safe-conduct!' said Ducarrig, with a laugh. 'You're said to have friends in both camps, aren't you, Palliser? . . .'" (249) Car attempts to act as a conciliator and urgently murmurs to Dan, "'*Don't fight with him!*'" (250). But confrontation is avoided. As one of the guests leaves the table to hear Car sing, Ducarrig, who is drinking heavily, remarks, "'There's no accounting for tastes. . . You going too, Palliser? You like the lady better than the wine, eh?'" (251). Dan ignores the remark. Later, when Dan is shown an anonymous letter linking himself and Car, he threatens Ducarrig with physical violence, but Ducarrig backs off, and Dan leaves.

Through this scene, Ducarrig has played the stereotypical role of the drunken, jealous, bullying husband. He goads Dan but inevitably backs down when confronted with a stronger force. Ducarrig is the first totally negative representation of an upper-class character in Somerville and Ross; he has no redeeming features. There is never a hint of sympathy regarding his situation, and his characterization is also completely humorless. Ducarrig is upper-class and Protestant, but he is also a unionist and a colonialist. His negative representation is a reflection of the political situation in Ireland, and the tension between him and Dan

regarding Car also mirrors the divisions within the upper-classes regarding the partition of Ireland and the differences between Protestant unionists of the North and Protestant Home Rulers and pro-nationalists of the South.

The representation of Car is far more enigmatic than that of her husband on both the personal and political level. Car is able to maintain an outward calm and to continue in her role as the gracious wife, hostess, and entertainer. She seems to love Dan and wants to avoid violence, but, when Dan leaves, she continues to entertain and flirt with Ducarrig's associates. She appears to be unable to free herself from her husband's control. The reader never learns what truly motivates Car: fear, vanity, or a desire to maintain her position despite its degradations and humiliations. The last scene of the novel perhaps reveals her true identity. She considers eloping with Dan but, "Should she face all that it would mean?" (261). She hears "Raiders," presumably members of the Irish Republican Army, coming to get Ducarrig's guns. She wakes her husband, who physically disgusts her: "How sodden and red he looked! Horrible!" (261). Then, as Ducarrig takes command of the situation, ordering all around him, organizing an armed resistance, and shooting the raiders from the upstairs windows, Car's attitude changes. Like her husband, Car again submits to a superior force. In this moment of action and violence, she is attracted to him: "Car

had never liked him better. Heavy and elderly as he was, he was playing the game. She snatched up two cases of cartridges, and rushed upstairs to the windows at the end of the corridor, to be ready with the cartridges for the slower-footed men with the guns" (263). In the killing that takes place, Car unquestioningly and thoughtlessly follows her husband's authority in his politically-motivated acts of hatred and violence even though she has told Dan, "'I know nothing about this Irish mess'" (73). Dan is killed by Ducarrig during the course of the I. R. A. raid. Thus, her act of complicity dooms her to continue her life of "Purgatory."

Thus, in the representation of the Ducarrigs the interconnection of gender and class politics emerge more clearly than before. Car's action at the end is perhaps symptomatic of her life with her husband. Despite her repugnance of him, she seems to submit to his way of life. Perhaps she made a wrong choice in her youth. Perhaps she had no choice in her marriage, but, clearly, she has made no attempt to change or subvert the status quo. She understands the nature of her marriage; she recognizes its hypocrisy, but she has accepted it. While Car is not unfaithful to her husband according to the letter of the law, she has certainly assumed the role of the seductress, tempting Dan away from his pledge to Ireland and finally leading him to his death at

the hands of her jealous husband. At the end, Car eagerly surrenders to her husband and becomes his accomplice in Dan's death.

### **The Politics of Farmers and Shopkeepers**

Dan Palliser's death is the result of many interrelated causes in the complex and violent political situation of Ireland in the 1920s. Despite his protestations that "I have no politics," "Mr. Facing Both Ways," as he calls himself, is deeply involved in Irish politics and in the social relationships of his community, which he directly seeks to alter. On the personal level, he has already rejected his family's advice to marry and emigrate, and he later undermines the status quo by his relationship with his neighbor's wife. The changes and advances that he proposes for the agricultural community are of far greater interest and significance, however. Dan's attempts to bring economic and social progress to his small part of Ireland and his failure on account of local opposition, the national political climate, and his own personal indeterminacy, are, after all, the focus of this novel.

On his own land, Dan undertakes relatively few changes: a transition from grazing to tillage and the purchase of a steam-tractor. Dan's innovative methods, learned at the Agricultural College, have been ridiculed by his late father

and his overseer, Tom McLoughlen, but now Dan intends to have his way despite Tom's opposition.

'Tom,' began Dan firmly, 'I'm, going to do a lot of things you won't approve of--'

'God bless ye, sir,' replied Tom, reverently lifting his cap. 'You're my master, and what you says must do!'

Brief as his period of authority had been, Dan had already found that this declaration implied an immutable resolve of disobedience.

'Whether I'm your master or no, I'm my own, and I'm going to farm this place my own way.' (24)

Clearly, Dan attempts to assert his authority, and although this friendship is "deeply-felt and ancient" (25), it is clearly not one of equals. Yet Tom is mocking: "'Well Mr. Dan's a rich gentleman, and he's able to do these things, God bless him! Isn't it grand . . . what genthry can do?'" and Dan is angry, "'Tom, you're a fool!'" (25). Like all the characters in these novels, we learn something of Tom's history and his mixed background: "Though the conquered race had asserted itself within, without he was pure Cromwellian" (23). Tom is another important example of the racial mixture within the classes. He also represents the stereotypical conservatism of the peasant classes regardless of race. Once again those elements in society who refuse to accept progress are censored: "Nowhere does the reformer plough a more lonely furrow or is the power of precedent more potent, than among the tillers of the soil" (26). In Mount Music, the Anglo-Irish are guilty of reactionary attitudes, but in An Enthusiast the peasant and farmers are guilty.



Dan's major innovation is the introduction of the steam-tractor to his farm, one of the few humorous scenes in the novel. Like the hunting scenes, it provides the author an opportunity to create a microcosm of rural Ireland. Dan's mother assumes the role of "Lady Bountiful": "the preparation of food on a large scale appealed to some ancestral strain of munificence that was latent in her" (127). Here she can, temporarily, reassume a position of importance and significance. Lady Ducarrig arrives and notices Dan's changed demeanor. The farmyard is filled with a variety of vehicles, carts, traps and motor-cars reflecting the different classes who have come to view the tractor while "[g]roups of farmers, comfortable middle-aged men, in their Sunday clothes, strolled from one attraction to another, squired by Dan, or his subordinates, full of loud-voiced praise and secret criticism" (128). Members of the Rural District Council are present, but Dan is excluded from the conversation which inevitably turns to politics and to the local activities of Sinn Fein. Effectively, he becomes an "outsider" on his own property, reflecting once again the new position of the Anglo-Irish.

Because he decides to farm his land himself, Dan's position within the social hierarchy of rural Ireland changes. He acquires new friends and enters into new relationships on equal terms with men who were once his

tenants. However, as the son of Colonel Palliser, he still retains certain entitlements, thus creating a paradoxical situation, the irony of which is fully explained.

In Ireland the rights of succession and inheritance are respected unfailingly. An office or privilege which has been held by a father is felt to be the lawful due of his son. Therefore it was that, on the death of Colonel Palliser, the Presidentship of the Agricultural Society of Eskragh passed, almost automatically, to his son, and Dan, an ex-British officer, son of a landlord and loyalist, was placed unquestioningly on the box seat of a coach whose officials and passengers were theoretically antagonistic to him on almost every point of conduct, religion, and politics. (88)

No doubt, Somerville's ability to perceive this anomaly must result in part from her position as a suffragist and as a woman who was keenly aware of the disparity between men and women's political power. If Colonel Palliser's offspring had been a woman, she certainly would not have "automatically" become the next President of the society regardless of her religion or politics. Thus once again, Somerville's feminism and her sensitivity to gender issues transfers itself to issues of broader political significance--class issues.

Dan undermines his own alienation by seizing the opportunity of this assembly to spread "his gospel of salvation" (131), his co-operative society. He also becomes a member of the Farmer's Society and is appointed Vice-Chairman. However, not all societies operate as in the days of the Ascendancy. The Rural District Council always elects one local magistrate on its board, and the position has become

vacant. Jimmy Ryan, a neighbor and friend, proposes Dan to another member, Nicholas Coyne. Coyne agrees to support Dan but only after he has made Ryan agree that he will support Coyne's tender for the coal contract. Dan is elected ignorant of the fact that the man who will become his most dangerous opponent has supported his election.

The proceedings of the Council are represented through Dan's eyes. It transpires that the membership of the Farmer's Society is the same as the membership of the Rural District Council, yet Dan notices a distinct difference in the behavior of the same people in the two different environments, in their conduct as farmers and in their conduct as councilmen: "It bewildered the beginner at the game of local self-government to discover that these administrators, in their civic capacity, recognised a different standard of morality from that which influenced their private life and conduct" (63). Of course, Dan's observation matches his own political philosophy that the solution to Ireland's problems are economic not political, so it follows that his views on the activities of the Council be jaundiced. He quickly becomes disillusioned since "he had rushed, possibly too hastily, to the conclusion that its principles were controlled by money, and its arguments consisted of clamour and vituperation" (64). A description of the meeting ensues (64) in which the council members are represented stereotypically

as "the fighting Irish"; but, once again, as we have seen before in problematic passages in *Somerville* and *Ross*, it becomes difficult to separate the viewpoints of the narrator and Dan Palliser.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of his participation in these societies, Dan comes into contact with Ryan and Coyne, two very different men who reflect the changes in the relationships between and among the classes in rural Ireland. Ryan is described as "a farmer of established prosperity" (26), "sane, practical, conservative, cunning and good-natured, generous and stingy" (27) and representative of the new class of Irish farmers (36-7). Ryan is a neighbor and friend of Dan's; his family had been the Pallisers' tenants for several generations. Now the two men have entered into a new social relationship as equals: they are both prosperous farmers, no longer landlord and tenant. Ryan's class position is made clear in his attitude towards the rural laboring classes, "'Don't I know them fellows! They'd rather do a thing wrong than right; it'd be a satisfaction to them!" (27). As we have already seen in these novels of *Somerville* and *Ross*, the narrator uses Ryan to provide a representation of one class by another. Ryan's comments are further evidence of the shifts in the construction of class and religion in rural Ireland. Despite being a man of the land with peasant roots, Ryan clearly differentiates between his own attitude as an

established farmer and those of the laborers although both groups are native Irish and Catholic. When Dan finally resigns from the Farmers' Society, the loyal Ryan is by his side. In An Enthusiast, class and religion among Catholics in rural Ireland are no longer represented as a single entity as they were, for example, in The Real Charlotte, where Catholics were represented only as lower-class. Class positions and attitudes are changing and, despite imminent civil war, amongst the farming interests there appears to be a strong tendency towards a national identity.

Another prominent member of the Rural District Council is Nicholas Coyne, the local coal merchant and entrepreneur. The antagonism between Coyne and Dan reflects the tensions between the middle and upper classes. Coyne is represented as the typical gombeenman (usurer); as he points out himself "'everything . . . has its market value'" (33). Ryan has warned Dan that he would face opposition from Coyne because, as he explains, Dan's co-operative stores have "'cut the ground from under profiteering prices'" (228). Similarly, J. C. Beckett has pointed out that "the shopkeeping and merchant class . . . felt uneasy at the prospect of a strong co-operative system establishing itself throughout the country" (Making 408). Coyne is also represented as a nationalist, waving "the national green banner" (61), appealing to "pathriotism" and "fidelitee to his church" (62). However,

unlike other nationalist characters in the novel and unlike Dan, Coyne is not represented as a true Irish patriot. After the arrest of a Sinn Fein sympathizer, Eugene Cashen, it is strongly implied that Coyne, the flag-waving nationalist, is guilty of collaboration: a local priest remarks that Coyne has become good friends with the new local chief of police (115), and, later, when it emerges that Coyne is a friend of Lord Ducarrig, it is stated that "'no man could be friends with Lord Ducarrig and be a friend of Ireland--'" (229). As we saw in Mount Music, commercial interest can erase religious divisions.

Coyne does not appear often in the novel, but, his dissemination of dangerous rumors regarding Dan gravely affects the plot. Eventually, it is widely rumored that Dan is responsible for Eugene Cashen's arrest and that his intimacy with both Lord Ducarrig and his wife is suspect. There is little doubt that Coyne is the source of the rumors. Coyne is also finally exposed as the author of the anonymous letter to Ducarrig linking Dan and Lady Ducarrig, an action which may indirectly contribute to Dan's death. Coyne's adversarial relationship with Dan clearly demonstrates how personal, class, and national politics are closely interrelated.

### Political Idealists

Politics of a national significance (discussions on the fate and future of Ireland, hints of civil war) surface directly in the novel through Dan's friendship with Father Hugh McNamara, the local Jesuit priest, through his meeting with Eugene Cashen the Sinn Feiner, and through events which overtake the lives of his past tenants. No such representations have appeared before in the writing of Somerville and Ross. These characters are represented sympathetically and without a trace of irony. McNamara and Cashen provide a striking contrast to Coyne and Ducarrig or indeed to the various clerics in Mount Music. Like Dan, these two men appear primarily concerned with the ultimate good of the whole community, and, unlike Coyne and Ducarrig, they are not motivated by immediate self-interest. All three are united by their anxiety for the future of Ireland, and it is this love of country that blurs the obvious differences of class, race and religion. Dan and Hugh quickly recognize in each other "a link of spirit," and "a similar outlook" (53). The exceptional quality of this relationship is noted in the role change between the two men: Dan listens as the priest confesses his inability to quell the violence and his growing pessimism. Dan, as yet, resists such a pessimistic outlook and reveals his solution to the priest. "'Prosperity is what

will bring peace!' he declared. 'And education! . . .'" (57). Hugh is impressed and, as result of this encounter, tells Dan he should meet Cashen.

The representation of Father Hugh as the man of peace is a remarkable one for a novel whose author had often been represented as prejudiced towards the Catholic community. Certainly, no other representation of a cleric which is so completely sympathetic exists in the writers' other novels; indeed, like Chaucer's priest in the Canterbury Tales, Hugh is represented without real censure or even irony. He is an exemplary pastor to his flock, always present when needed. His friendship for Dan is genuine, and, in the end, he risks even this friendship he values so highly to save Dan's reputation: "'Let him be vexed with me!'" (224), he thinks, as he intends to warn Dan of the dangerous rumors--some true some false--regarding his friendship with both the DuCarrigs and his continuing implication in the arrest of Cashen. Hugh understands human weakness both amongst his own congregation and amongst those who not are of his Church. When he meets Dan and Car by the lake, he never condemns them but sees only their "suffering" and "'trouble'"; and, acting as a true Christian and a true man of peace, he "put up a prayer for those two troubled souls, that was the more fervent for the fact that they were not of his communion" (240). Hugh's representation is a striking contrast to that element in the



Catholic clergy whom Lee characterizes as "the lunatic fringe working out their personal neuroses on courting couples with the blackthorn stick" ("Women" 42). There are no heroes in the novels of Somerville and Ross, but the representation of this Catholic priest is the closest representation of an imperfect, but truly good and selfless human being.

Eugene Cashen, the Sinn Fein sympathizer, appears only once in the novel in a central chapter positioned half-way through the book. Although he is described as having red hair, this is no stereotypical, racial representation, and his characterization strives to represent the seemingly contradictory fusion of cultures which is an integral part of the Irish situation. Cashen is a self-educated man. Not surprisingly, he owns books of poetry and Irish history; he has written a "manual" on the Irish language, but he also quotes Shakespeare, and he has been an inspector for the Congested Districts Board. Cashen is one of the few who is able to keep a gun because, as he says, "'they have a notion I'm keeping the country quiet.'" (114). He describes himself as "'no better than an outlaw'" (114); yet, he says, "'I'm against this damnable murdering of policemen in cold blood!'" (116-17). He also has a brother who is policeman. He has a "strong brogue," yet he is never represented as using dialect.<sup>22</sup> There is little dialect in the novel as a whole.

The meeting between Dan and Cashen is arranged by Hugh, who acts as the intermediary between the two men of action and whose excuse for engineering the meeting has sprung from Dan's desire to learn Irish. Dan and Cashen have already had some contact, however; Dan has sent Cashen his pamphlets on co-operatives. Since Dan is a friend of Hugh's, Cashen is willing to meet him. The meeting provides an opportunity for the author to represent what she believes to be the different positions of true Irish patriots. Dan's position as an economic reformer has already been represented. Tension quickly surfaces when Cashen implies that Ireland needs more drastic solutions than Dan's "'palliatives,'" Ireland needs "'the doctor's knife'" (118). Hugh foresees only suffering: "it's a knife they've used to cut her into two halves" (119). In contrast to Hugh's pessimism, Dan clings to the hopeful, but unrealistic, viewpoint of the Anglo-Irish and the Irish Convention that those halves may reunite: "'We can't do without Ulster, and she'll find out the same about us some day!'" (119). Cashen, representing the Sinn Fein viewpoint, is enraged over the English Government's policies in Ireland and gives his account of Irish history. Dan's own unspoken prejudices preface Cashen's remarks and represent the Sinn Fein sympathizer as "handicapped by the singleness of his own soul, steeped in an embittered literature that recognised but one point of view" (120). Whether Dan's

viewpoint coincides with the narrator's seems irrelevant since Cashen is given the space to present his nationalist view of Irish history.

The discussion of Ireland's fate is not pursued and tension is deflated by the suggestion of tea as Cashen excuses himself, not for his politics, but for the lack of strong drink. "'This is a temperance house'" (121).<sup>13</sup> The shift to tea and normality is quickly shattered. The political dynamics of the situation change as the men react as one to the threat of police: "The three men started to their feet." Dan becomes Cashen's accomplice in his escape: "All the Irish blood in him asserting itself inevitably, irresistibly, on the side of the man 'wanted' by the law" (122). In a second, differences of class, religion, and politics are once again erased as the three men are united by their Irishness and their resistance to the English law. Faced with the violence of an occupying force, this novel comes close to a representation of a unifying national identity.

This incident is pivotal to the development of Dan's political positioning as well as to the way in which he will be read by both sides of the political divide. The police recognize Dan as the local magistrate; later his family see him as "'going too far with his Nationalistic tendencies'" (155) and "'turning rebel'" (156), and, as already noted, the

farmers treat him as an outsider. Ironically, the seemingly normal tractor episode immediately follows the incident of Cashen's arrest. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that all is not normal:

Pleasant, well-mannered, and apparently responsive , as were all to whom he spoke, Dan was aware of something tense, expectant, and strained, as of men in a besieged city, a city that is besieged by two rival armies and is ready to capitulate to either, but is uncertain with which of them safety lies. . . . He and his like were kept outside. Dan knew that, and knew too, badly as the knowledge hurt him, that though none ever brought more single hearts than such as he to the helping of Ireland, he, and those like him, must submit and stand outside. (130-31)

Of course, Dan does not understand that he is treated as an outsider because he insists on positioning himself thus. However, in a situation which is obviously becoming increasingly tense, and despite his protestations to the contrary, Dan will not and cannot remain an outsider. Already, unknown to him, he is becoming more embroiled in the political situation of betrayal, suspicion, fear, and violence. A week or so following his meeting with Cashen, Dan goes to visit a former tenant. On his way, he sees the burned remains of the local police barracks his father had financed. When he arrives at the Curtin home, it soon transpires that both Curtin's sons have been "shot like dogs" (142). Realizing that one of the Curtins has died, Dan leaves. He thinks of "this obscure and secret tragedy, of which he knew nothing yet guessed all; with its past a remorseless intrigue, its

present a vain sacrifice, its outcome a hidden grave" (144). Quickly he translates this latest human suffering in terms of an abstraction, and thus he dedicates himself to an idea, "'to Ireland'" (144). Because Dan makes a vow only to an idea that is not grounded in political reality or strategy other than to erase differences with "Prosperity," his efforts will prove to be fruitless. Furthermore, because he is unable to make a definite commitment to any specific vision of Ireland (only an idealized one where all people come together to farm cooperatively and which completely ignores the political and social reality of Dublin), he is regarded by both sides as a traitor.

The reality of this position becomes clear to Dan just moments after he has made his vow when he encounters the hatred of Cashen's sister who believes Dan is a police informer. The contradiction of Dan's position intensifies. Four members of Sinn Fein come to Dan's house at night, demanding money for their army. Although Dan vows to dedicate himself to Ireland, and although he expresses "'a good deal of sympathy with'" Sinn Fein (176), Dan still pays allegiance to the Empire: "'I said I had fought for the King, and I wasn't going to pay men to fight against him'" (175). Not surprisingly, therefore, he is viewed by the people as an ex-officer of "a foreign army" (180). Paradoxically, at the very moment when Dan makes his most clear political

statement, he declares he has "no politics." Unaware of his contradictory position, Dan knows only that "'I'm called a rebel by my own lot, and I'm treated as an enemy by the rebels'" (176). Thus his uncle says that "'he went to sympathize with a man whose son was shot in that attack on the barracks'" while his mother defensively explains that "'he went to see Curtin, who is an old tenant, about the Co-operative Society'" (197). In fact, the reason for Dan's visit is never explained. Only Hugh recognizes that Dan does have politics (interpreted in this context as a love for Ireland) despite his protestations to the contrary. Thus Hugh warns Dan that he cannot "'stop half-way'" and remarks, "he had never known a man who took his politics as hard as this one" (178).

Realizing Dan's ambiguous positioning in Ireland, the narrator attempts to compare Dan's situation with that of "'the poor decent creature of small farmers'" harried by the "'police--them new "Black and Tans,"'" by day and Sinn Fein by night. But, of course, this is a quite false analogy. Dan is hardly a poor creature: he is unlikely to be bullied by the regular police (admittedly the Black and Tans might be another matter); he is the local magistrate; his father financed the construction of their barracks; furthermore, as Hugh intimates, Dan can always flee to England. However, being a man of honor, and, despite his disillusionment with

Ireland and his love for Car, Dan stays to become another of Ireland's victim-martyrs.

Throughout, Dan has defined himself politically in terms of what he is not: "'I'm not a Unionist,' he reflected, 'and I'm certainly not a Sinn Feiner'" (80). These thoughts clearly reflect the crisis of the Anglo-Irish who besides their loss of status and political power are rapidly losing their identity. Moreover, Dan's one political act is a negative one. Disillusioned with both the Farmer's Society and the Agricultural Society, he finally decides to resign from both because "'the men whom I worked with and trusted, wouldn't trust me!'" (232-33) and because he sees himself as the victim of the politicians' "'mud-slinging.'" His resignation allows him to condemn the farmers as he reproaches them for their failures and short-comings. His speech adopts a tone of moral superiority: "'I've done my best for the farmers and their interest'"; in effect, it becomes patronizing and reminiscent of the Major's complaints of ingratitude in Mount Music. "'What have politics to say to a Co-operation Creamery? . . . But because I don't call myself a Sinn Feiner, you make that an excuse to go back on your promises to back me up in things that are only for your own advantage!'" He criticizes them as though they are ignorant children, thereby reassuming his ancestors' attitudes. However, all along, Dan remains ignorant of the fact

that the man who is primarily responsible for undermining his co-operative is Coyne, no Sinn Feiner, but a gombeenman, a man on the make. Becoming seduced by his own rhetoric and his sense of power, "Dan was beginning almost to enjoy himself" (233). Finally, he condemns the farmers outright, accusing them of cowardly behavior:

being stampeded to hell, like a lot of sheep over a cliff, because you're afraid to say what every one of you thinks of these blackguards, these strangers and Bolshevists--I wouldn't believe anyone who told me they were Irishmen--who are teaching, yes! and forcing your innocent boys to burn and rob and murder and are bringing ruin on Ireland and on her industries and her people. (234)

Of course, Dan lays the blame for Ireland's problems on other outsiders, "strangers and Bolshevists" as he still clings to his ideal of creating a unifying national identity through his cooperative farming and the lure of economic prosperity.<sup>4</sup>

Although he becomes far more sympathetic to the Sinn Fein cause through his meetings with Cashen and Curtin and his friendship with Father Hugh, Dan's position does not fundamentally change. Through these men, Dan encounters another Ireland that might otherwise have remained completely hidden from him. Despite his repugnance towards the unionist position and despite his new insight, Dan does not withdraw his allegiance to the Empire. Within the Irish context, he refuses to take sides and remains entrenched within the contact zone. Like his creator, Edith Somerville, he calls



himself, "Mr. Facing-bothways" (74).<sup>15</sup> Finally, Dan is killed not by a Sinn Feiner, but by the unionist, Lord Ducarrig. Possessing no guns himself, Dan is shot waving his father's Crimean sword, symbol of the British Empire.

### Conclusion

In his downfall and death, however, Dan is linked to a number of Irish heroes: to Parnell whose affair with a married woman and whose subsequent denunciation by the Catholic Church is now legendary; to Plunkett whose cooperative society was destroyed by the Black and Tans; and, finally, to the leaders of the 1916 uprising, particularly with the figure of Patrick Pearse who presented a "[m]essianic and sacrificial notion that the 'Irish' cause was somehow congruent with Christ's sacrifice" and whose "aesthetic frequently celebrated the beauty of boys dying bravely in their prime" (Foster 477). Additionally, Foster notes that "the Parnellite style of post-1917 Sinn Fein has been noted by more than one analyst; and Parnell was the ideal appealed to explicitly in 1918 by both Griffith and de Valera" (491). Thus, only in the representation of his death does Dan succeed in uniting Anglo-Irish and native Irish, Protestants and Catholics, Home Rulers and Republicans, reformers and revolutionaries.

Dan's position of reform is ambiguous. His stated goal is to bring peace to Ireland, and he believes that this can be achieved through "Prosperity": "His thoughts turned to his own recipe for tranquilizing his fellow-countrymen. Prosperity. Was he making the wrong declaration, playing a hopeless game? Can romance be stifled with feather beds, however deep and comfortable?" (138) On the one hand, Dan's proposed changes in agriculture and his own transition from his position as a landlord to that of a farmer attempt to subvert the status quo.

On the other hand, his proposals for an improved standard of living, which will "tranquilize" and "stifle" political revolution so that social relationships in Ireland will not be fundamentally changed, support the status quo. Furthermore, his position, like that of many constructive Unionists (Lyons, Ireland 202-24) and Home Rulers (Foster 428), is a contradictory one. In the last analysis, Dan resembles Major Dick in that he fails to read the historical situation. Turning his back on the recently-acquired political power of Sinn Fein in the borough local elections, he continues to preach prosperity. However, as Plunkett's biographer remarks: "Increased prosperity had done nothing to dampen the fires of nationalism, leading to the conclusion that the problem was political and amenable only to a political solution" (West 178).

An Enthusiast seems to mark a real change in Somerville's writing. The most overtly political of all the novels, it examines in greater depth the dilemma of the Anglo-Irish. Certainly, the author identifies closely with Dan Palliser both in his personal politics (or avowed lack of them) and his untenable situation. In this novel, Somerville seems finally to have broken with the ideology of the inherent superiority of the Anglo-Irish, an ideology which will be further deconstructed in The Big House of Inver.

Nevertheless, Dan, who clearly no longer identifies with the upper-class, Anglo-Irish as a political group, firmly resists the hegemony of the newly emerging State. Dan deceives himself because, although he rejects the ideology of the class from which he originates, he cannot free himself from their history and their emblems. Like Somerville, although he recognizes the need for change and is able to befriend Father Hugh, he refuses to surrender his special identity. As a result, his leadership is bankrupt.

Finally, although the novel strives to portray the failure of the once-dominant Anglo-Irish and their inability to provide leadership despite their concessions, it still fails to completely recognize the myth of their inherent superiority and the totality of their demise.

## Endnotes

1 See Book Review Digest (1921, 1922).

2 Although Ross was dead, Somerville always insisted that the novels written by her alone should be published under the names of both Somerville and Ross.

3 See Cliona Murphy (8).

4 Guy Fehlmann also notices many similarities between Dan Palliser and Horace Plunkett (259).

5 I will refer to Somerville as the sole author of Mount Music, An Enthusiast, and The Big House of Inver despite her claim in the forward that she and Martin planned this novel together, and despite her insistence that all her subsequent fiction include Ross as her collaborator.

6 By 1918, women in Ireland had obtained suffrage; they could vote, be party workers and stand as candidates although only Sinn Fein had women candidates: Constance de Markievicz and Winifred Carney (Cullen Owens 122).

7 Correctly or incorrectly, Somerville considers religious bigotry to be the main cause of divisions within Ireland. This is understandable if one examines the religious rhetoric ("Home Rule is Pope Rule") emanating from Ulster at that time and the threat of the Ulster Unionism which would ultimately divide Ireland. It is no coincidence, for example, that the narrator already refers to "Southern Ireland" (251) as a distinct entity from what is now known as Northern Ireland.

8 Robinson notes quite correctly that in Ireland "religious differences were supported by race and class" (153), but she does not actually show this.

9 In the Irish context, "ethnicity" would be the most exact term to use here since "race" carries the connotation of oppression. However to introduce the concept of ethnicity at this point would be to complicate matters unnecessarily. Somerville and Ross would not have been aware of the distinction between race and ethnicity. Furthermore, the term "race" is being used here in the nineteenth-century sense to denote a particular group or tribe with similar genetic characteristics and not to denote a social construction.

12 Representations of race sometimes become confused with class as in the description of Dr. Mangan's daughter, Tishy: "she was tall and strongly built, tall, that is to say, for a class that rarely excels in height" (137).

13 Farmers were running wires along their to keep the hunters off their land. From a distance, the wires were invisible to horse and rider and so they caused the horses to fall.

14 Knocknagow, "the most loved and read of all Irish novels" (Deane, Short History 103) by Charles Kickham, published in 1878 contains representations of cruel and despotic landlords.

15 In the world of Somerville and Ross, where the horse is always privileged, Donovan's curses can easily be excused by the nature of the situation: the horse's imminent death and Christian and Donovan's mutual love of horses.

16 Although I am referring specifically to Somerville here, it would appear that Ross's attitude to Catholicism would be similar to Somerville's. See note 15.

17 In her spirituality and ecumenism, Christian may reflect the position of Somerville and Ross. We know the Martins were once Catholic and that Ross was baptized by a Catholic priest. Gifford Lewis also writes of Somerville: "After her parents' death, Edith constructed a kind of icon out of a portrait of Henry and a portrait of Adelaide and a crucifix. They hung above the head of her bed" (190). Crucifixes are associated with Catholics rather than Protestants, who would normally prefer a plain cross rather than one depicting the crucified body of Christ. Somerville must have undoubtedly tended towards the religious practices of the High Church of Ireland. Gifford Lewis also points out that the Somervilles, who came from Scotland, "had been High Church Episcopalian" and some of Edith's contemporaries favored "Anglo-Catholicism" rather than the (low) Church of Ireland (23).

18 This is highly deceptive, however, as Larry calls Evans an "Orangeman." As Terry Eagleton explains, the Orange order, established in Ulster in 1795, "represents one of the most intimate bondings between lower and upper classes in the history of British class relations" and nullified "the distinctions between religion, politics and social life" (82). Thus it is not surprising that Evans is unconcerned with class issues, but this is not to imply that his

religious bigotry is not political. In fact, it is just the reverse. Orangeism was originally established to defend the power of the Ascendancy. It remained (and remains) powerful in Ulster, but when Somerville was writing Mount Music, even Southern Unionists, were separating themselves from Northern Unionists who were closely connected to the Orange Order.

It is worth pointing out that only Catholics themselves or those with a knowledge of Catholics would talk of going to "Mass." Throughout the novel Somerville uses details such as lenten observances (56, 125,) the Angelus (125), confession and first communion (133), references to the month of May as being that of the Virgin Mary (137), all of which demonstrate her intimate knowledge of Roman Catholic practices.

Kurt Bowen notes that "the Ne Temere decree of 1908 . . . required signed and witnessed promises from both parties that all children be baptized, educated, and raised as Catholics" (43).

Noble families from the north of England were more likely to remain Roman Catholic since they were further removed from London and the center of power. Winston Churchill regards the Catholics of the North of England as "Proud, independent, semi-feudal nobles . . . Moreover there was a deep religious division between North and South. The South was largely Protestant, the North remained dominantly Catholic" (86). I am indebted to Professor Albert Fields for this reference.

The influence of these ballads has continued on well into the twentieth century. Eavan Boland in her autobiography, Object Lessons. The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time, refers to this volume (180-82)).

Robinson states that the description "is based on the Cork County Eagle and Muster Advertiser's 10, September, 1910 report of a meeting of the Skibereen Rural District Council" (170).

By contrast, Cashen's sister, Abina, is described as a racial type:

Her black hair was parted in the middle. The beauty of her features . . . was discounted by its want of originality. She might have been a model for nine out of ten sacred pictures. With such a face it was incredibly appropriate that her fate should have been joined with the stormy one of an advanced revolutionary;

it was as though her future had been irrevocably fixed; she looked predestined to be the Bride of Heaven. (117)

<sup>13</sup> Once again the detailed knowledge of Somerville presents itself. Commenting upon "the determined nature of Sinn Fein" a unionist writes thus: "'The active Sinn Feiners are all young and intelligent men, generally teetotallers. Unlike the ordinary political fellows, they do not patronise publichouses and talk there over matters'" (qtd. in Buckland 135).

<sup>14</sup> Dan does not realize that "in the blood sacrifice of Easter week Connolly buried Irish socialism for several decades" (Lee, Modernisation 152). However, Munck, referring to the nationalist and labor movements in Ireland point that 1919 to 1921 was "a period of dual power" when "the role of labour was critical in maintaining the impetus of republicanism" (58). An Enthusiast also refers to the railway workers' strike of 1920. Several other industrial actions taken by Irish workers' are cited by Munk (58-59), as, for example, the Limerick Commune.

<sup>15</sup> Somerville's biographer, Maurice Collis, notes that in a letter dated 16 February, 1921, when she was still revising An Enthusiast, Somerville calls herself "'half-rebel and a Miss Facing-both-ways'" (206).

## CHAPTER 4

### SUBVERTING RACE, "BLOOD," AND FAMILY

On a first reading, The Big House of Inver, published in 1925, might appear to be a highly reactionary novel, particularly in its representation of the native Irish and in its consideration of race. The plot centers once again on marriage and the transfer of property, and an Anglo-Irish dynasty figures prominently as the title suggests. Furthermore, there is no talk of politics and no character similar to Father Hugh or to Eugene Cashen. That Somerville's social position in Ireland had changed once more is certainly possible. Somerville was sixty-five at the time of writing this novel. She was aging, and the memory of Ross also seems to have returned to influence the construction of the plot.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, perhaps, the novel was composed after the Civil War and after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The political situation in the Irish Free State was no longer fluid; Sinn Fein was clearly in control of the partitioned country and the Anglo-Irish had lost any hope of political power. In April 1923, De Valera announced a cease in hostilities with the pro-treaty forces, and in May 1923, W. T. Cosgrave became the new president of the second Dail. Kurt Bowen notes that of the fourteen Protestants elected to the 1923 Dail, many had strong nationalist connections or



were certainly sympathetic to nationalist aspirations. Nevertheless, as is to be expected, "in the new climate that was emerging there was little place in electoral politics for those with ascendancy backgrounds" (49). Patrick Buckland points out that at the time when "the Free State was formally proclaimed . . . , Anglo-Ireland's political determination and strength had evaporated" (272).<sup>4</sup>

This was also a period when many writers were becoming increasingly alienated from the repressive atmosphere of the post-revolutionary, Catholic, petit bourgeois state (Kiberd 264) and were emigrating to Europe. Part of the "rigorous conservatism" of the new state, and what R. F. Foster considers to be the most important element of this "atmosphere and mentality" was that "the dominant pre-occupation of the regime was self-definition against Britain" (516). In the process of "De-Anglicising" themselves and in defining themselves against their former colonialists, the Irish created a mirror image of Anglo-Saxonism: Celticism. L. P. Curtis describes this construction as "an ethnocentric form of nationalism with a strong measure of race consciousness which many Irish used to arm themselves against Anglo-Saxon claims of cultural and racial superiority" (109). Luke Gibbons also describes Celticism

as an attempt to construe a native culture as a manifestation of an underlying racial or national 'character', and not the least of the ironies of this form of

cultural exclusivity is that it is itself largely an import into Irish culture . . . Celticism sought to impose a racial uniformity on the state of flux that was Irish culture. ("Challenging the Canon" 563).

In this political and cultural context, it would hardly be surprising, perhaps, if Somerville had written a politically-reactionary novel. However, it is precisely this "racial uniformity" and the conditions that gave rise to it that this post-colonial novel resists.

This resistance to "racial uniformity" is sometimes confused and uneven (since Somerville and Ross sometimes interchange the terms class and race). That it exists at all in The Big House of Inver can be explained by the fact that such a concept of "racial uniformity" would firmly exclude the Anglo-Irish from any political power in the post-colonial state. Indeed, driven to its extreme, or in the case where there is a "remarriage of 'race' and 'nation'" (Hudson 258), such a policy might indeed threaten the desire of the Anglo-Irish to remain in the Free State. Although the authors may not always have been opposed to "racial uniformity,"<sup>4</sup> it was certainly now in Somerville's interest and in the interest of the Anglo-Irish to resist an ideology of "racial uniformity." As Kurt Bowen has also pointed out, the Anglo-Irish "feared retribution for the sins of their fathers, and they looked forward with trepidation to a state of exclusion similar to that which they had imposed on the Catholic majority some 200

years earlier" (17). Certainly, Somerville, unlike Matthew Arnold, is not advocating "a commingling of the Saxon and the Celt" but rather, like George Sigerson, she might argue "that Irishness incorporated the residue of several cultural or racial strains, as befitted a country exposed to successive waves of invasion and internal strife over the centuries" (Gibbons, "Race Against Time" 105).

The first evidence of a resistance to the concept of "racial uniformity" is the very noticeable absence of any characters described as characteristically "Irish" in The Big House of Inver, an identity, as we noted before in the discussion of the novels, which is always presented with positive connotations. The only character in this novel who raises the issue of national identity is the Englishman; he, however, uses it only pejoratively, and, furthermore, he is not represented simply as the familiar, ignorant Englishman but as a colonialist. In his article "Race Against Time," Luke Gibbons refers to this "racial concept of an Irish national character" as an extension of colonialism, a construct which existed in Mount Music, for example, but which is almost completely absent from this novel. Gibbons also points out the fact that "the notion of race calcified a dynamic cultural identity, thereby playing into the hands of the colonial regime, escaped the notice of all but the more astute nationalist writers" ("Challenging the Canon"

563). Ironically, Somerville and Ross, who have themselves so often been accused of colonial attitudes, should be attempting to resist this imposition of "racial uniformity."

### **The Big House of Inver**

The Big House of Inver has been compared by many critics (Cronin, Jeffares, Cahalan), to Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent in its representation of the crumbling fortunes of the Prendeville family. However, the once wealthy Anglo-Irish Prendevilles are not the sole focus of the novel; equally important are the Weldons, the middle-class Protestant family of peasant origins. Also present are the lower-class, native Irish Connors, who play a small but vital role in the novel's plot. Unlike novels written before The Big House of Inver, religion and politics are not its focus. What is also conspicuously absent from this late novel is the representation of the special relationship between the gentry and the peasant class--the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish--which has always been featured in Somerville and Ross's novels.<sup>4</sup> Marriage and the transferal of property--particularly land--are an essential part of the plot, but, in this novel, land is also represented differently. It is represented as being only a commodity and possessing no intrinsic value. There is no discussion of the use of land, and the representation of farmers of any class is also absent. The

representation of class is always present, but class appears not to be an inherited quality but a commodity which can be acquired. The Big House of Inver also differs from the other novels we have considered by its prominent discussion of race. While recognizing that race is a social construct employed in the domination of one group by another, I am also using the term "race" as it was used in the nineteenth century as "a biological division created by environment or originally established by God" (Hudson 257), a construct which creates divisions, categories, and hierarchies, and which establishes also "an innate and fixed disparity in the physical and intellectual make-up of different peoples" (258). Aside from tracing the history or "pedigrees" of three individual families, the novel represents several characters as being molded by their "blood"--their genetic inheritance. Throughout the novel there are references to "race," "blood," "ancestors," "hereditary characteristics," and "half-breeds." Furthermore, the main protagonist of the novel, Shibby Pindy, is not only of mixed blood, but she is also illegitimate, an identity which further raises the question of her name and her legal status, and which draws interesting parallels between her status and identity and the legal status of the Anglo-Irish after 1922.

The construction of "racial uniformity," however, is immediately subverted in the first description of the

Predevilles, who are, in actuality, not strictly Anglo-Irish but descended from the old Norman stock. The Big House of Inver, whose fate is indirectly the focus of the novel, is of the Queen Ann period and was built by a member of the Ascendancy, Mr. Robert Predeville. Robert's son, "Beauty Kit" married Lady Isabella Devannes, and their children all intermarried with the native Irish; thus "[f]ive generations of mainly half-bred and wholly profligate Predevilles rioted out their lives in the Big House, living with country women, fighting, drinking, gambling" (10-11) and fulfilling the stereotypical images of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish. Already the Predevilles' habit of "living with country women," (i.e. women not of their race), is implied as being a practice as equally debauched as "fighting, drinking, and gambling." The sixth generation Predeville married "a woman of good birth, Miss Susan Moore" (11) whose only son, Captain Jasper, returned from India in 1849. Jas enters into a liaison with a distant cousin who bears him an illegitimate child, Isabella, known later as Shibby Pindy. At the age of sixty-three, Jas finally marries Esther McKnight, daughter of a Methodist minister who bears him two children, a daughter Nessie, and a son Kit. Like Shibby's mother, she dies in childbirth, leaving the care of her children to their illegitimate half-sister.

The fortunes of the Prendeilles had been steadily declining since the period when Lady Isabella's children intermarried with their groom and gamekeeper; the "lands of Inver" were lost through drinking and gambling, and, the Big House being uninhabitable, Jas's mother took up residence in the Norman Tower. From then on, the Big House remained abandoned, but the Prendeville estate was still viable thanks to the actions of Jas' mother and her agent, Mick Weldon.

Old Mick and Madam Prendeville had done well for Jas in their stewardship of what still remained of the once far-reaching Prendeville property. They had somehow dragged it through the famine without failing in mercy and charity to those whom in those long-past times they held in the hollow of their hands. Now, in spite of the heavy mortgages, both old and new, it was still bringing in a fairly steady fifteen hundred pounds a year. (21-22).

This is one of the few instances in the novel where reference is made to the relationship of landlord and tenants, but it is certainly not a "special relationship" based on friendship and a common interest in the land; rather it is a relationship based on power and control. The years of the Land League and the famine of 1882 have also depleted Jas' resources, so that in 1887, his agent, John Weldon, who "had continued to ascend the social ladder in singularly direct relations to his employer's descent" (34), profits from Jas's excessive drinking habits to acquire the tenancy "of the demesne-lands of Ross Inver" at a low rent and a very long lease. Several years later, after the passing of the

revolutionary 1903 Land Act, Weldon's son, young John, persuaded Captain Jas "to sanction" the sale of the demesne to his father. This is the situation of Jas Prendeville and his children when the main action of the novel begins in 1912.

### **The Myth of Racial Purity**

From the above account, it is clear that the novel is concerned with family, hereditary characteristics, and the question of intermarriage between people of different race and class. John Cronin points out, "'mixed marriages' . . . in Somerville and Ross, invariably presage social ruin and decay" (Anglo-Irish 149).<sup>5</sup> A closer look at the description of the decay, however, indicates that intermarriage between races is of itself not the sole cause of the Prendevilles' ruin. The fault in the lineage, the origin of the decay, can be traced back to Kit and Isabella Prendeville (pure-bred, Anglo-Irish Ascendancy) as Shibby realizes when she curses the portrait of Lady Isabella. Beauty Kit is described as "a bad boy, dissolute and drunken, but his looks and his fortune were as good as his morals were bad" (9). Lady Isabella, in spite of her aristocratic blood (or perhaps because of it) is also represented as being partially responsible for her children's fate. Widowed at a young age, she refused "in arrogance, to know, or to let her children know her



neighbours, freezing herself into, as it were, an iceberg of pride" (10). Thus unlike the Anglo-Irish of a much later epoch in Mount Music and An Enthusiast, this upper-class woman has insisted on isolating herself totally from her neighbors, and has herself, perhaps, insisted on a policy of "racial uniformity" for her children, preventing them from socializing with middle-class families. Paradoxically, Lady Isabella's sense of superiority and consequent isolation drives her children into hasty marriages with the servants of the Big House, the only people they meet. Moreover, the dissipation that is represented in the later "half-breed" Prendeilles had already manifested itself in an earlier, pure-bred Prendeville, Beauty Kit. Thus the downfall of the Prendeilles may not be the result of intermarriage with others of a different race, but rather the consequence of the "environment" or an "innate" characteristic of the Prendeilles themselves. As McHugh and Harmon have stated, this novel is a "study of the self-caused cycle of doom of a family through several generations" (185).

Aside from Kit Prendeville's bad morals and Lady Isabella's pride, other aspects of the Prendeville dynasty are also highly questionable. The family motto, closely connected to their name, is the Norman, "'Je prends,'" which translated means "I take," and the family crest is "a mailed hand" (9). The rapacious nature of the family motto

symbolized in the crest is also reflected in the actions of a contemporary Prendeville.

The Prendeville motto, "Je prends," had in Inveragh and Cloon received the sanction of centuries, and the Widow Hynes [a distant relation of Jas] was sufficiently medieval to enable her to accept with composure a certain Droit de Seigneur that was, as a rule, based rather on might than on right. So it was that when she poured libations to her young lord, she did so, more often than not, by the hand of her good-looking daughter, Margaret, and resented not at all that Jas should in his acknowledgements, include a kiss to the cup-bearer. Jas had never heard of the Droit de Seigneur, and he was equally unaware of possessing Mr. Wordsworth's authority for asserting that they should take who have the power. Jas was a child of nature, as well as being the son of his father, and when he wanted anything he obeyed, quite simply, the family motto and took. (23-24)

The relations between one race and another in this passage reveal the exploitation of the native Irish by the colonialists, and the willingness of the native Irish to accept these conditions if they could somehow benefit from their own exploitation. As Edward Said has pointed out, "Imperialism after all is a cooperative venture. Both the master and slave participate in it, and both grew up in it, albeit unequally" (74).

In The Big House of Inver, there is little evidence of any friendship between the native Irish and the Anglo-Irish. The special relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the peasant class exists only in Old John Weldon's love for the Prendevilles although, ironically, he himself has been an instrument of their economic decline. Furthermore, this

special relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish always implies a relationship between two races and two religions, but Old John is Protestant, and, therefore, presumably, not native Irish although this is never clarified. This relationship of friendship and mutual respect, idealized, for example, in Mount Music, is replaced by a relationship of abuse, deceit, and distrust that had evolved from the lingering feudal relationship in Ireland and that had persisted into the nineteenth century. Its existence is a bitter indictment of the British policy in Ireland that fostered the domination of one race by another--a domination which could be perceived as reversible. The existence and representation of the consequences of this policy may possibly provide another explanation besides racial impurity for the demise of the Anglo-Irish dynasty. Unlike the previous novels considered in this study, there is not the least suggestion that the Anglo-Irish are morally superior.

The second family whose history or "pedigree" is examined is the Weldon family. Guy Fehlmann states that "The Big House of Inver est le seul roman de Somerville et Ross, et peut-être aussi le seul dans toute la littérature anglo-irlandaise, qui offre un image complète de la mutation d'une famille paysanne en famille bourgeoise" (337). Mick Weldon, Old John Weldon, and Young John Weldon have been successive agents to the Prendevilles, their fortunes rising in contrast

to their employers' decline. In introducing the successive generations, the narrator describes Mick Weldon as "the first of the dynasty to emerge from the paternal boghole" (64). The image of this family emerging from the "boghole" is so strikingly pejorative that it is important to remember that this image represents lower-class Protestants, not lower-class, Irish Catholics. Furthermore, although the Weldons' fortunes rise dramatically in the course of the novel, they too intermarry with native Irish Catholics, but Catholics of a similar class. Thus Old John Weldon marries

the daughter of a poor farmer. She had no 'fortune.' She was not of John's religion (which was that of the Protestant Church of Ireland), and he had married little Molly Casey for the sake of love and her good looks and had snapped his fingers at old Mick's indignation, and the disapproval alike of priest and parson. (69)

Despite his mixed marriage, Old John and his descendants enjoy economic and social success far beyond his own ambitious dreams. When examining the question of race and heredity in The Big House of Inver, it is important to remember this mixed marriage and the subsequent success of all the Weldons as the existence of these two occurrences contrasts the decline of the Predevilles. It would appear, therefore, that "mixed marriage" alone in this novel cannot "presage social ruin and decay."

In discovering a cause for the Predeville's decline, it is also useful to examine the manner in which Jas and Old

John select their mates. It is perhaps no coincidence or oversight on the part of author that Old John's rejection "of priest and parson" in his decision to marry Molly Casey echoes Jas' own action in taking Margaret to live with him in the Tower "in defiance of priest and parson" (24). However, any comparison between these two men of the same generation and the same religion ends there. Jas takes his woman as an exercise of power; he lives with her in a relationship that is unsanctioned by either the church or the state. Old John Weldon, on the other hand, though only recently emerged from his "boghole," marries the woman he loves, a poor Catholic, but legitimizes that union in the eyes of the law. Both men are Protestant, and both take native Irish, Catholic women, but there is a considerable difference in the manner in which the two men select their women. Jas is prompted by desire and power and the "droit de seigneur"; Old John is motivated simply by love. Unlike members of the peasant or gentry classes, Old John (like Dr. Mangan) chooses his wife unhindered by such issues as wealth, land, or religion but in obedience to the law. It would appear, then, that although the novel raises the construct of race, racial purity alone no longer guarantees economic and social success in The Big House of Inver if, indeed, it ever did in Somerville's writing.

## **"Natives" and "Primitives"**

Old John Weldon is one of the most likable characters in Somerville and Ross. Thus we need to be reminded that, early in the novel, Old John benefits directly from the Prendeville's weaknesses. Yet (unlike Dr. Mangan) sympathy for Old John grows, and his life and his old age contrast with that of his employer and social superior, Captain Jas, and highlight the differences in their fortunes: "In the year 1912, John was ninety-two, four years older than his feudal lord, Captain Jas, but time and little Molly Casey had served him well. He had, as he was accustomed to say, 'minded himself better than the poor Captain . . .'" (69). Though fond of his drink "on state occasions," Old John enjoyed "a hearty and prosperous old age," and "still kept a firm hand on all his affairs" (69). Mentally and physically vigorous, Old John is the one who visits "the poor old Captain" (86) as he calls Jas. By contrast, sitting next to his turf fire, passively awaiting his daughters who take care of him, Jas is

a dramatic, even a stagey impersonation of the tragedy of old age. . . Jas had drunk hard all his life, but not harder than many others. He had lived dissolutely, but not more so than those that had gone before him. He had been one of the predestined failures, standard examples of a bad heredity . . . He had in his life, ruined himself, and considerably disappointed his friends . . . (61)

The question of heredity is raised once again, but it is left vague.

Old John was certainly an opportunist in his youth, but age and security have mellowed him. When his son, Young Johnny, arranges the purchase of the demesne for him, he is adamantly opposed to the arrangement, being "well pleased enough" with the lease (67). However, the deal having been done,

Old John's lot in life was happy beyond the lot of most men. He had had his dream, and it had come true. He found it almost incredible that those broad and beautiful acres, that from his boyhood he had known and revered almost too worshipfully to dream of possessing them, were inalienably his. (67-68)

Obviously, Old John's attitude to the land is very different from Charlotte Mullen's, for example, another land "grabber." Although Old John is neither an Anglo-Irish landlord nor a peasant farmer, but a land agent, like Roddy Lambert, he loves the land for itself and not for the money, power, or status it represents. He alone in the novel loves and reveres the land for its own sake. As Guy Fehlmann explains: "La terre représentait pour lui autre chose que l'aisance matérielle. La terre était tout autant le gage de la dignité humaine de l'indépendance retrouvées après huit siècle de servage" (127). Despite the positive changes in his own life, Old John regrets the past, "'I declare to you when I thinks of old times, I'd nearly have to cry!'" (91). The narrator calls him "a primitive," and, in his love for the

land, Old John is idealized and identified with the native Irish peasant.

A "primitive" in some respects, Old John controls his life and astutely plans the future of his beloved granddaughter, Peggy. With Shibby Pindy as an ally, the only other named "primitive" in the novel, he devises the marriage of Peggy to Jas' son Kit. Hoping that the demesne will once again be returned to the Predevilles and united to the Big House, he wills his land, not to his son, but to Peggy. His efforts to turn back the clock and to return to the old relationships of another era will be thwarted, however, by the subversive actions of the native Irish, the inherited dissipation of the Predevilles, and the presence of an English colonialist. Hearing that the arranged match between Peggy and Kit has been broken off, Old John fights with his son and suffers a stroke that eventually kills him. His English daughter-in-law seems to have the last word on this land-grabber: "'he was always mad about the Predevilles'" (220). Undoubtedly, his ideas and desires are out of touch with the new social relationships. The representation of Old John is certainly complex. This undeniably shrewd and cunning land agent, having acquired the land of the gentry, is represented as acting as justly and as generously as an idealized member of the upper classes might have done--although such a representation has not been found in the four



novels considered in this study. Thus, denied a return to a previous age, in his own role reversal, Old John parodies the class he both admires and subverts.

While Old John is represented both as a member of the protestant land-owning middle-class and as a "primitive," Captain Jas typifies the decline of the Anglo-Irish. He has not provided for his children, his mental abilities are limited, and he is barely able to sign his name.

No one, not even Shibby, expected anything of him but that he would forever sit, wrapped in an orange-brown frieze coat, with a sailor's blue woollen nightcap on his head, and an old horse-blanket over his knees, by the turf-fire in the little sitting-room of the Tower of Inver. To the two children, born to him out of his time, he was no more than a permanent and rather troublesome fact of nature, as it might be the stump of an old tree in their path, impossible to root up, but--or so Kit found it--not too difficult to evade or ignore. (61)

In this passage, we have the final representation of a descendant of the Anglo-Irish gentry living like a native Irish peasant in a Norman tower, wrapped in an Irish wool coat by a peat fire. Old Jas now appears to be the "primitive." The emblem of the past Anglo-Irish Ascendancy is represented by the horse-blanket, and the sailor's cap must surely be emblematic of the Empire which he once served, still present but irrelevant to the new generation. As Old John's love of the land and his regret for the past identifies him with the gentry, so Captain Jas looks and acts like a poor, illiterate peasant. We know he has lost his lands

long before the novel begins, and, at the end, he is persuaded to sell the Big House of Inver to Young John Weldon's client, the Englishman, Sir Harold Burgrave.

The representation of this ruined Anglo-Irishman concludes logically in the destruction of his house and his history. Jas finishes his days in "a condition of deep torpor" (304), aimlessly following Shibby around the Big House, and suffocates in the fire that consumes the House.<sup>5</sup> It is strongly implied that Captain Jas himself is the cause of the fire. Earlier in the novel, there is a reference to his pipe smoking (55), and later Shibby notes that she can only find him by the smell of his tobacco: "'If it wasn't for the old pipe he has I might give the day looking for him!' Shibby would complain; . . . On this afternoon her task was light, and the potent aroma of 'shag' tobacco led her no further than the dining-room" (201-2). It is also no coincidence that on this particular afternoon, Jas first unintentionally hints that the Big House may be sold to an Englishman. Jas is the cause of his own destruction, but, inadvertently, he also prevents the house from falling into the hands of the colonialist--as it is Burgrave and not Peggy Weldon who would own the house.

### **Representations of Race and Class Antagonism**

Although the fate of the legitimate branch of the Prendevilles figures so prominently, the main protagonist is Shibby Pindy, the illegitimate daughter of Jas Prendeville and Margaret Hynes. Shibby is a complex character who bears many resemblances to Charlotte Mullen of The Real Charlotte and Dr. Mangan of Mount Music. Her driving ambitions, to restore the Big House of Inver and to see Kit married to Peggy Weldon, thus uniting the House with the demesne, are comparable to the match-making goals and financial aspirations of Charlotte Mullen and Dr. Mangan. Unlike these two characters, however, Shibby has Norman and aristocratic Anglo-Irish ancestors. Apart from a physical resemblance to her ancestor, Lady Isabella, however, she is rarely represented as Anglo-Irish either in terms of race, religion or class although the matter of heredity in her representation is more evident than in any other character, except in her half-brother, Kit. In addition, the duality in Shibby's representation, her mixed race, her dubious class position as well as the question of her legal status, is clearly and consciously constructed and not implied. Furthermore, her desires and ambitions combined with her will-power and her physical energy exist in the space where her mixed peasant

and Anglo-Irish ancestry intersect with the constructs of both her class and gender.

Shibby Pindy is a very different woman from Charlotte Mullen. Although her physical stature, strength, and will may be regarded as male characteristics, there is little ambiguity in Shibby's gender identity. However, as Charlotte's physical appearance always posits the ambiguity of Charlotte's gender, Shibby's physical appearance posits Shibby's mixed ancestry and thus raises the issues of racial purity and of racial uniformity. Her Prendeville ancestry manifests itself in her physical resemblance to her father, in her stature, and in her blue eyes. As a young woman, she was deemed to be "beautiful" and to resemble her eighteenth-century ancestor, Lady Isabella, after whom she is named: "Those who had seen the portrait of the Lady Isabella would declare that no better likeness of Shibby Pindy could be imagined" (58). But Shibby has inherited more than Lady Isabella's beauty; she has also inherited her pride. It is this characteristic that frustrates her mother's efforts at match-making and explains her own refusal of Dr. Magner's marriage proposal. Having rejected a life with the man she loves and having "chosen loneliness" instead (307), she devotes herself entirely to her two half-siblings, in particular the boy, Kit: "There was discovered in Shibby a passion for babies that had not before found an outlet. She

took her half-brother in her arms with rapture that for all her self-control she could not hide, and became thenceforth his slave" (39). Shibby, unlike Charlotte Mullen, is capable of inspiring love and respect in the men she knows. Dr. Magner never marries and always remains her friend; Old John Weldon calls her "'the finest Prendeville o' the lot of them, whatever way she was got!'" (214).

Old John is of course referring to Shibby's illegitimacy. Shibby is not only of mixed race, as are so many characters in this novel, she is also illegitimate; so the issue of her racial impurity is complicated and blurred by the legal issue of her illegitimacy which is represented as a matter of accident or fate. (Had her father not been called away to the Cape with his regiment, it is quite "probable that Jas would have made his peace with all concerned" and married her mother.) It is her illegitimacy also, that causes Shibby to reject the man she loves as she tells him frankly, "'Willy, I wouldn't wrong you or your children'" (59). When Shibby signs her name as a witness to Old John's will, she is once again confronted by the duality of her identity: "she wrote her name in the tidy script that she had learned at the National School--'Isabella Hynes (or Pindy)'--her mother's name, the only name that was legally hers, and the detestable nick-name by which she was known, that she shared with those she despised" (184). Shibby's

illegitimacy, essentially a legal, social construct, represents another aspect of Shibby's particular form of dual identity that has been the hallmark of the main protagonists in the writings of Somerville and Ross. Early in the novel, the English Mrs. Weldon raises the issue of Shibby's illegitimacy and the question of her name:

she had found it so difficult to know what to call her. 'Miss Prendeville' was impossible. 'Miss Pindy' would amount to acceptance of a position so equivocal that Mrs. Weldon could hardly bear to think of it, much less acknowledge it. . . . Finally, . . . Mrs. Johnny had compromised on 'Miss Isabella.' And it would be hard to express the gratification that this title afforded to Shibby, she who was Mahomet's coffin indeed, without so much as a name on the coffin-plate to which she could lay claim to. (78-79).

Thus both Mrs. Weldon and the narrator are concerned not only with the purity of Shibby's blood but with the question of her name and her legal status, the problem that derives from her illegitimacy.

Despite her pride and her ancestry, Shibby has lived like a peasant woman so that, inevitably, race begins to be closely connected with class. Indeed, "she went through life the servant of her father, making no claim on him, her single protest a proud refusal to take wages. When she was three and twenty Jas had offered to pay her for her work. She had faced him and said, 'I want no wages from you!'" (38). However, it always remains unclear whether her position within the Prendeville household results from her race and

gender or her illegitimate status. She is described as an "early riser," a "hard worker" (205); she has "strong shoulders" (207), "strong hands" (290), is "as strong as a tower" (201), and wears a "thick, country-made shoe" (149). Her physical strength also reflects her strength of character. She murmurs "little peasant words of love" (205) to a distressed child; she displays "the stern practicality of the Irish peasant woman" (143); and she is described as being "too primitive, too essentially elemental, to analyze or define her moods" (140). Her race, her peasant ancestry, is also reflected in her religion; she is a practicing Catholic: she sings in the chapel (58) and wears rosary beads around her neck (110). She is also superstitious; she believes in "luck" (24) and "bad luck" (241) and frequently curses those who stand in the way of her objectives.

Shibby is constructed as a native Irish woman: her poverty, her position as her father's servant, her poor education, her non-standard idiolect, her Catholicism, yet her self-definition resists the identity given her by society, and she refuses to be assimilated into the society of her mother's people. The identity of the Predevilles continually reasserts itself within Shibby Pindy or Isabella Prende-ville as she might have been known. Although she sees herself as differing from the Predevilles, from her own father, in terms of class and legitimacy, she identifies

herself with the Prendevilles on the grounds of race: "she knew herself to be a Prendeville by every token of race, hands, feet, eyes and stature" (184), and of religion, "'I have Protestant seed and breed in me'" (288). Despite her native Irish identity, Shibby's racial attitudes, her ethnocentrism, reflects Curtis's description of "the specifically English and Victorian form of ethnocentrism":

Ethnocentrism characterized that nucleus of beliefs and attitudes, cultivated and cherished by people who seek relief from some of their own anxieties and fears, which make for more or less rigid distinctions between their own group (or in-group) and some other collection of people (or out-group) with the result that the former are ranked far above the latter in the assumed hierarchy of peoples, nations, or ethnic units which together make up the species of man. For the ethnocentrist all groups other than his own tend to become out-groups which are by definition inferior, subordinate, and unworthy. Ethnocentric thinking flourishes in a climate of anxiety, fear, guilt, as these emotions permeate both the individual and the class or group to which he belongs, and it is reinforced by the delusion that the value or physical proximity of the out-group somehow pose a direct threat to his own way of life. (Anglo-Saxons 7)

Shibby's ethnocentrism is evident not only in her delusions regarding the superiority of her half-brother but also in her attitude to other people she believes to be inferior to herself: the Weldons and the Connors. Having evicted all the Pindys, the illegitimate branch of the Prendevilles who have been "squatting" in the Big House, and having taken full possession herself of the empty House, Shibby gazes at the portrait of Beauty Kit and recognizes the resemblance between



her eighteenth-century ancestor and her half-brother, Kit. At that moment, Shibby decides that Kit shall once more inhabit a restored Big House of Inver. She deludes herself by regarding Kit not just as nobility, but indeed as royalty: "'The King shall have his own again!' Inver should once more worthily house a reigning Prendeville! Her boy should live as a gentleman should, as his ancestors did" (51). And with a touch of irony, the narrator adds, "She felt as Flora Macdonald possibly felt when the chance came to her of saving the Prince whom she adored" (51).<sup>15</sup>

Thus her ambition to restore both the House and her brother to their "rightful" positions has become her overwhelming passion, her *raison d'être* for the past eleven years. In addition, she now conspires to marry Kit to Peggy Weldon, who will inherit the demesne of Inver on the death of her grandfather. In the past, Shibby has regarded the Weldons as "the Grabbers" (53), so she laughs at her changed attitude towards Peggy Weldon. 'Well, well, little I'd ha' thought long ago that I'd be jollying myself with having a match made between Johnny Weldon's daughter and the Heir of Inver! Thrown away I'd ha' said he was--and I'd say it now, too, if it wasn't that I seen Old John's will!'" (213). Shibby's ethnocentrism and her passionate ambition have clouded her ability to perceive reality so that she seriously overestimates the desirability of her half-brother, "the Heir

of Inver," and scorns Peggy Weldon who is presently being courted by a rich Englishman.

Although Shibby may see herself as a descendant of the Prendevilles in racial terms, the narrator, like Shibby herself, makes a distinction between her racial and class identity. In her education, her ambitions, and her tastes she often seems to have middle-class aspirations and to parody the gentry from whom she is partly descended. When Shibby first realizes the resemblance between the portrait of Beauty Kit and her brother, Kit, she understands that they are "so strangely alike in every way, save the one that was for her the most important of all--the glory of wealth that glowed from every detail of the portrait, from the jewel at the lace collar to the loaded magnificence of the frame" (51). She is not concerned with a past age, with elegance or refinement; she is concerned only with wealth. The narrator admires her efforts at refurbishing the Big House, collecting oddly-assorted furniture at local auctions out of her meager savings (52), yet she consciously mocks and subverts those efforts by emphasizing Shibby's bad taste. More importantly, Shibby displays her middle-class tendencies through her indifference towards the land; unlike Old John, the demesne represents for her only money, an attitude that she falsely ascribes to Peggy Weldon: "'What would the like of Peggy

Weldon want with the Demesne? For certain sure she'd rather the money! . . .'" (53-54).

Although she despises the younger Weldons, Shibby's real race and class hatred is reserved for the Connors. In her dealings with the Connors and the Pindys, Shibby possesses none of the paternalism that normally characterize the Anglo-Irish in a Somerville and Ross novel since, through her mother, she is of the same class as the Connors. The Connors are lower-class, native Irish publicans from Cloon where, as the doctor points out, "'The people in this village have been marrying and inter-marrying in a ruinous circle since the days of Adam!'" (180).<sup>22</sup> In her relations with the Connors, Shibby clearly displays her classic ethnocentrism. Shibby hates them because she feels threatened by them; she fears that they wield a malign influence upon Kit, who, it must be remembered, also possesses lower-class, native Irish ancestors. She particularly hates Maggie Connor whom she fears will seduce Kit and destroy his chances of making a wealthy marriage. It is Shibby's insecurity that fuels her hatred and her ethnocentrism; thus her relationship with the Connors is very different from Charlotte's relationship with her tenants. Charlotte was driven by her desire for Lambert and not by her hatred for Francie or Mrs. Lambert although, assuredly, the authors' contempt for the "turkey hen" was certainly evident. In the case of both Francie and Mrs.

Lambert, however, Charlotte's intellectual superiority was such that although Mrs. Lambert was socially her superior and although Francie was young and pretty, Charlotte ultimately perceived herself to be in control and unthreatened. This is not the case with Shibby; Shibby can rely only on her will-power and her hatred to achieve her ambitions, and Maggie presents a real threat to Shibby's ambitions. Her worst fears are realized when Jim Connors, Maggie's brother, reveals that "'Kit has seduced . . . Maggie, who will have a child'" (218).

The Connors are stereotypical representations of the native Irish in terms of race and class although their religious practices are never deprecated. In a novel that focuses on race at a time when "Gaelicizing the new state was a preoccupation--the kind of process typical of many post-colonial states, highly sensitive to the influence of a once-dominant neighbor" (Foster 518), the Connors are a horrible parody of racial purity. Their representation might embody the author's understanding of the consequences of British racist policies in Ireland. The Connors might well signify what Somerville now believes to be the fate of a people that has been isolated and dominated for many generations. As we shall see, this state of isolation and degeneration will also be the fate of the Predevilles. In this representation of the relationship between the Predevilles and the Connors,

the author seems at times to have favored imaginative exaggeration over realistic observation. However, it is important to remember that the Connors are represented from Shibby's ethnocentric viewpoint. No other representation similar to this exists in the novels of Somerville and Ross examined in this study.

Maggie is represented stereotypically as red-headed and clothed in the traditional black shawl "held discreetly over her mouth, in the fashion that obtains in the south and west of Ireland" (97). She also "'comes of a tuberculous family,'" (225), but the representation of her heredity is far worse. Maggie Connor, or Foxy Mag, as she is often referred to, is

the product of the most degraded of Cloon's many public houses, whose mother had died in the County Lunatic Asylum, whose father had drunk himself into premature old age, whose brother, on one of his many appearances before the Bench of Magistrates, had been described by the Sergeant of Police as being what he might call "a hereditary blackguard." (97)

Since she is the descendant of lunatics, alcoholics, and criminals, facts which are later reiterated by Dr. Magner (180), it is only to be expected that Maggie herself is represented as having criminal tendencies with the possibility of becoming mad herself. Maggie has been represented primarily from Shibby's warped viewpoint, but in a scene where Kit and Peggy observe her, the effect is quite different: "[A]s they watched her, she flung out her arms from

beneath her shawl. Her fists were clenched; it was as though she was denouncing the Big House. The black shawl slipped from her head, and the sunshine lit up coils of red hair, heaped untidily on her head" (197-98). Undoubtedly, when Maggie is portrayed as the abandoned yet defiant pregnant woman, there is sympathy, even a "terrible beauty" in her representation. Despite her vile ancestry, Maggie is one of the many characters in Somerville and Ross who resist the fate that others attempt to impose on them. Although Maggie, like Francie, is unable to sustain her defiance and resistance, her attempt nevertheless signifies the author's sympathy and admiration.

Maggie's brother, Jimmy, is usually depicted as scarcely human and resembles the caricatures of the Irish to be found in some Victorian newspapers and magazines. Sharing Maggie's ancestry, he is "a heavy young man, with a fat red face, a bristling moustache, and a nasal tenor voice" (227). Jimmy Connors is Captain Jas's tenant. When Shibby threatens him with eviction his "usual crimson hue" becomes "mottled with a variety of unpleasing colours, induced by conflicting emotions of rage and fear" (228). Desperately searching for Maggie and shouting at Peggy and Burgrave, with "foam on his coarse mouth" (294), he is represented as totally irrational, out of control, and inhuman. He is compared to "a dog that growls and shows its teeth but is afraid to bite" (229).

Peggy describes his words as "almost unintelligible" (294), his reactions are slow because his mind is "whiskey-sodden" (230), and he, too, is described as looking "like a madman" (294). Finally, he loses his individuality altogether when, as the narrator adds, "he spat at her such an epithet as he and his like employ in a last resort of hatred and rage" (my emphasis 295). The shebeen that he owns is an equally grim place and "had the distinction, not easily earned, of being the worst conducted of its four rivals in the village of Cloon" (226). That a "stained print of Mr. Parnell," the Protestant, Anglo-Irish Home Rule leader can be found there is certainly an anomaly (230)."

The Connors also provide Shibby with the opportunity to reveal herself as a cruel and ruthless landlord. Taking advantage of her tenant's impecunity and indebtedness, she unhesitatingly divides the family. Desperate to rid herself of Maggie, Shibby uses her small inheritance from Old John to blackmail Connor into emigrating to America with Maggie, threatening him with eviction if he fails to comply: "'I can put you out on the roadside tomorrow'" (229). When Connor voices concern regarding his elderly father (Connor may be represented as showing genuine concern for his sister and father), Shibby insists, "'I'll see to your father. He'll be all right'" (231). She fails to keep her word, however, as the old man ends his days in the workhouse (307). Fate

intervenes once more as Connor has undermined all Shibby's efforts and has already told Peggy's father the truth about Kit and Maggie. Despite Connor's gender and his propensity to violence, he is intimidated by Shibby. Shibby's depth of emotion, her hatred of Maggie, and her determination to carry through her ambition give her a power and a status she has never possessed. "'I have no more to say,' she said, moving past the cowed Jimmy Connor like a queen" (321). The illegitimate peasant woman has attained regal stature. The class nature of Shibby's relationship with Jimmy Connors is clearly evident, but, as we will see later, in her relationship with another male, her half-brother Kit, this race and class relationship is also clearly marked by the gender representation of Shibby as the dominant woman.

Shibby's ethnocentrism and her hatred for the Connors intensify during the course of the novel and become aimed primarily towards Maggie although she has always had murderous thoughts towards this woman: "She would picture herself asking Maggie Connor to tea at the Tower, and putting something, she knew not what, strychnine perhaps,--it was a word that she knew--into her cup, something that would darkly and instantly work her will on her enemy" (97). When she sees Maggie with Kit at the races, "[a]ll thought was fused in the heat of her hatred" (110). Later that day she curses Maggie: "'That the Almighty God may strike Maggie Connor



dead!'" (147). The next evening as she waits for Kit to come home, "there had fallen a possession of hatred that shook her . . . She had gone outside Time. Her mind could register the intensity of her hatred of Maggie Connor" (150). Her hatred for Maggie and her family parallels Kit's increasing involvement with Maggie and Shibby's increasing insecurity. When she learns that Maggie is pregnant, she shocks even Kit, who knows her best, by suggesting that they have her committed (206). As she feels threatened, her contempt and hatred, however, intensify and finally become elemental. Although it is never stated, Shibby's hatred of Maggie must also certainly be influenced by her own mother's racial origins and history, and by the obvious coincidence that Maggie also bears her mother's name. Possibly, Shibby sees Kit and Maggie's relationship as a re-enactment of own parents' relationship, a relationship which resulted in her illegitimacy and in a legacy of poverty, shame, and loneliness. Although Shibby resists being identified with Maggie, through a distant ancestry, through her own past, and through their mutual passion for Kit, her resistance is constantly undermined by the narrator's representation of both as lower-class women with dreams and ambitions.

In her struggle to ensure Kit will be free to marry Peggy Weldon and reclaim the demesne, Shibby encounters a formidable opponent in Maggie Connor. Shibby triumphs, but,

like Charlotte, hers is also a pyrrhic victory. That no real closure exists and that the reader remains uncertain as to the cause of Maggie's fatal fall is characteristic of Somerville and Ross. Nevertheless, it is strongly suggested that Shibby lets Maggie fall. In the chain of events leading up to Maggie's death, both strands of Shibby's ancestry are evoked in her representation: she is represented as both native Irish and Catholic, Anglo-Irish and Protestant. Braving a fierce storm, Shibby attends her customary Sunday mass. As the storm intensifies symbolizing Shibby's "deepening hatred," Shibby ponders the problem of Maggie Connor. At twilight, Shibby, "a strong daughter of the West" (281) dons her "long hooded cloak that the peasant women wear of the south wear, and went out into the storm" (285), defying the elements to find Maggie. As a woman of persuasive powers, she has been asked to convince Maggie to emigrate since even the priest has been unable to move her, and both Connors are scheduled to leave Ireland the next morning. She crosses "the Crooked bridge, that her great-grandfather had built" (287); she sees the lights from "the small Protestant Church" and hears the sounds of its bell. Visually represented as a Catholic peasant, she is yet momentarily reminded of her Protestant ancestry. As the critical moment in their conflict approaches, both women are represented as primitives, as connected to the landscape. Shibby is "the

embodiment of the storm" and stands "like a great rock" (289) facing Maggie who sits like the leech-gatherer "on the great rock above the river . . . crouched, with her arms encircling her knees." Maggie is a "little, dimly-seen figure, so small an adversary, but so potent" (288). Shibby is represented from Maggie's viewpoint as "the intruder" (288)--the old colonialist perhaps--as Maggie defends her territory, "This is my place!" (288); yet both women, one of "pure blood" and one of "mixed blood" are united not only by their passion for Kit but also by their racial and gender representation as "primitives," "children of nature," women who have been colonized.

### **Mother and Son**

Shibby's obsessive and explicit hatred of Maggie, particularly as it relates to her role as a mother, is a relatively new departure in the representation of gender in the writing of Somerville and Ross. Furthermore, since this novel examines issues of race and heredity, and since it focuses not on society generally, but on three families, gender is represented as it operates within the family domain. Thus Shibby is portrayed as a dominant mother who comes into conflict with other women--Maggie, as well as with Peggy and Lady Isabella--only as they threaten the future of her surrogate son, her half-brother, Kit. Early in the

novel, referring to Shibby's attitude toward Peggy, we learn that "Shibby's contempt for her own sex was characteristic of her time and her class" (54). Her contempt for Peggy soon evaporates, however, as she objectifies Peggy as the ideal match for Kit and as the instrument of her ambitions. When she learns that Peggy has broken her engagement to Kit, her contempt for her sex defies time and space as she curses the portrait of her ancestor, Lady Isabella: "'It was you begun it! You that drove your own children to ruin and destruction!'" (241). The dominant mother who privileges the son's position in a family where an ineffective father also exists is a familiar figure in the post-colonial Irish writing of Joyce, O'Casey, and Patrick Kavanagh among others. Kiberd explains, "Women sought from their sons an emotional fulfillment denied them by their men," and "the women could not have achieved such dominance if many husbands had not also abdicated the role of the father" (381). Certainly, Shibby has denied herself a husband, and the senile Jas is no father to Kit. Coupled with Shibby's contempt for her own sex is her "unconscious cynicism as to masculine responsibility" (259), an attitude which is implied in all her dealings with Kit. Although it might appear that Shibby's representation as a matriarch focuses only on family relationships, Rosalind Coward has pointed out that in "this struggle over patriarchy and matriarchy . . . [t]he real subject was that of the

nature of political and social alliances. The real question asked of the data on sexual and familial organisations was what function they fulfilled in relation to wider social bonds" (12). Thus, as we shall see, the familial dynamics existing between Shibby, Jas, and Kit reflect the power relationships inherent in a colonial situation.

From his earliest childhood, Kit dominates Shibby's life, and after the early death of his own mother, Shibby effectually acts as his mother and becomes "his slave." Paradoxically, of course, it is Kit who becomes the slave of Shibby's ambition. She plans his education, his marriage, his life; thus she also becomes his "surrogate father" (Kiberd 381). Although life at the Tower is typically ordered "to suit the needs of the son of the house" (148), Shibby as the mother figure remains dominant; consequently, Kit never reaches adulthood. At twenty-four, Kit has no financial independence; as he tells Maggie, he must depend on Shibby for all his money: "'I haven't a penny, you may say, but what comes through her hands'" (138). As Maggie realizes (138), Kit is afraid of Shibby. Indeed Shibby watches his comings and goings: at the races she keeps a "lynx-eyed watch" (95) on him; she tries to prevent him frequenting the public houses; and she keeps a vigil until he returns (149).

Shibby treats Kit like an infant, referring to him constantly as "child" (102, 204, 242), protecting him, keeping

him ignorant, distrusting him, stunting his maturity and obstructing his independence. Guilty of cheating at the races, Kit tells Shibby, knowing "that her unfailing forgiveness was at hand" (154). Shibby condones his behavior: "she might condemn a fight, she loved a fighter" (151); she washes the dirt from his face, and he follows her "submissively" (154). The scene is repeated when Kit discovers Maggie's pregnancy; he seeks Shibby for "pity," "shelter," "infinite forgiveness" (204), and she, of course, sides with him wholeheartedly, always repudiating the actions of her own gender, "assenting to a young man's right to act as it pleased him, reserving all her condemnation for the woman" (205). Even his drinking is excused, since it is considered an inherited weakness. Kit is Shibby's reason for living, and, consequently, he sustains her in a mutually dependent relationship. Rejected by Peggy, he immediately turns to Shibby: "He had always come to her for help; what good was she if she couldn't help him now?" Naturally, Shibby complies: "Even in this moment of despair Shibby was glad of the weight of his reliance on her. He was weak--like his father before him, she thought--but the very weakness that tossed him to her breast was dear to her strength" (242).

Shibby's relationship with Kit reflects the power relationship of the colonial situation. As Curtis has pointed out, Paddy (or in this case Kit) was represented by

the English in the early nineteenth century as "feckless, devil-may-care, rollicking, hard-drinking, and hard-fighting," later as "childish, emotionally unstable, ignorant, indolent, superstitious, primitive" (Anglo-Saxons 52). All these characteristics made him unfit for self-government. Since he is treated like a child, Kit remains immature; consequently, his male gender becomes questionable: "Male and female positions are constructed through the acquisition of social identity" (Coward 297); but, clearly, Shibby has denied Kit the ability to realize such an identity. In his relationship with Maggie, he is unresponsive, "being too young, as well as too lacking in imagination, to understand or sympathise with another's emotions" (137). He cannot empathize with Maggie nor can he accept responsibility for her pregnancy. Kit cannot form deep or lasting relationships with women: he loved his horse "best in the world" (40). Realizing that Peggy is in love with him, he appreciates only his position of power: "'She is mine to do what I like with'" (215).

Kit does not change; dispatched to relatives by Shibby to avoid the crisis of Peggy's rejection, he voices only disappointment and easily consoles himself again with the thought that "'[o]n the whole, horses were safest'" (248). Kit's unconscious discomfort in his submission to Shibby is also reflected in his desire for "release" and "escape"

(204), a desire which can only be realized through money and the sale of the House. When Jas tries to rebel against the powerful mother-daughter, Kit is powerless: "The prison gates, which were beginning to open, were closing again" (204). Briefly, the child-like father and son conspire against the dominant mother, who has also become the "surrogate father." They accept Burgrave's offer to buy the House, thereby assuring the failure of Shibby's ambition for Kit since, without the House, Kit is nothing. In the end, the men are the cause of their own downfall.

Once again this Somerville and Ross novel highlights the repressive power structure within the family. This patriarchy, however, is defined anew by Kiberd as "the tyranny wrought by weak men" (391) and, one should add, dominant mothers as it reflects Ireland's colonial position.

In a colony the revolt by a son against a father is a meaningless gesture, because it can have no social effect. Since the natives do not have their hands on the levers of power, such a revolt can neither refurbish nor renew social institutions. To be effective it must be extended to outright revolution, or else sink back into the curtailed squabbles of family life. The pressure and intensity of family life in such a setting is due to the fact that the family is the one social institution with which the people can identify. (Kiberd 380)<sup>13</sup>

### **Changing Representations of Race, Gender, and Class**

It is surely no coincidence that in this novel, written in 1924 after the establishment of the Free State,



nationality is no longer represented as an issue amongst the Irish themselves as it was in Mount Music (1919), for example. The construct of nationality, like the construct of racial uniformity, is only of consequence as it is defined in contrast to otherness, in this case, Englishness. Furthermore, only Shibby with her ethnocentric obsession with "blood," and the Englishman views nationality in terms of race.<sup>14</sup> Within the construct of the family, Kit's racial and gender representation intersect. Although Kit is descended from the same mixed stock as Shibby (except for his mother, Esther McKnight, the daughter of a Methodist Minister), and as his marriage to Peggy seems less likely, Kit is represented as possessing the inherent "weaknesses" of the Prendevilles: an inclination to frequent the village pubs, a fondness for whiskey and lower-class women, and a love of horses. These inherited family vices together with his poor education and his childish nature result in Kit's being represented not as an Anglo-Irishman, but, like his father, as a native Irishman. In their failure, and in their inability to act, Jas and Kit become identified once again with the colonized native Irish. Kit, like his father, seems to have succumbed "to the primitive native culture in Ireland" (Gibbons, "Race," 97), a dubious quality, one that is admired by Old John, for example, but scorned by the Englishman. The question arises as to whether Kit's

immaturity and irresponsibility, his want of manhood, and his "degeneration" are the result of race, environment (the physical isolation of Inver), his education, his relative poverty, or his subjection to Shibby, all of which are closely interconnected and all of which converge to represent Kit as an image of a colonized subject.

As we have seen in the portrayal of Shibby, Maggie, and Kit, the representation of race frequently intersects with that of gender; but in the representation of the younger generation, Kit Prendeville and Peggy Weldon, race is also inflected by class in a way that has not been seen before in Somerville and Ross novels. Undoubtedly, Kit's situation in Irish society differs considerably from that of his father at the age of twenty-four. Even old Jas realizes, "'[h]e's not had the chances I had'" (283). Kit's education is the direct result of "the steady erosion to which Jas' income had been subjected" (41) and differs greatly from that of other young Anglo-Irishmen such as Dan Palliser or Larry Coppinger. His attendance at "National School at Cloon, followed by Mr. Kilbride's commercial College at Monarde" (41) have only encouraged his "native" tendencies: at the former he has learned very little except "how to chuck a stone, . . . how to climb a thin Connaught wall, and to jump a fence like a hound running a line" (41), and in the latter he learned "commonness of mind and manner" (42). Then failing miserably

at "one of the Queen's Colleges" (42) in Ireland, Kit finds employment at a training stables near Dublin where he develops "a taste for whiskey" and attempts to elope with the trainer's daughter. Kit's education has prepared him only for life at Inver, which "held him fast, as it had held his race for so many centuries" (43). He is practically illiterate as is evidenced by a letter he writes to Peggy; thus she judges his speech and manner not to be those of a young Anglo-Irishman. On her first meeting Kit, after a few years' absence, Peggy appears disappointed in his manner, remarking that "'his voice is common, not like a gentleman's . . . He's no fool--but I did think he'd be more like a gentleman. . . . His voice is as bad as Father's! '" (48). Peggy does not confuse race and class; she judges his class not by his "blood" or "pedigree," which she knows full well, but by his language, a reliable signifier of class.

For the first time, in a Somerville and Ross novel, class is represented as the immediate consequence of education, as a commodity which must be purchased and which is no longer simply the result of birth or "blood." Despite his Anglo-Irish blood, Kit is far removed from a position of moral superiority, not because his stock has been tainted by mixed blood but because he has not been able to purchase an education which has often been not simply a signifier of class but an inherent characteristic of class superiority.

It is certainly paradoxical that, in a novel which ultimately concerns itself with "blood" and "inherited characteristics," class (which has sometimes been confused with race) is contrasted to race as a construct which can no longer be inherited but which, in this changing society, can now only be bought.

Although both Peggy and Kit are ultimately colonized, Kit's class position and his education are directly contrasted with that of Peggy, who, after all, is only the fourth generation to have emerged from "the paternal boghole" (65). Peggy Weldon is also of mixed blood. Although she comes from Protestant peasant stock, her mother is English. As she stands contemplating the Big House of Inver and the loss of its demesne, the narrator remarks that she possesses two racial characteristics, "two strains of blood . . . the tough acquisitiveness of the Irish peasant, and the hardy practicality of the English middle classes" (80). (This is one of the few instances where race and nationality are confused.) Peggy defends her family's acquisition of the land; she thinks of the way her family, her class, are represented by the Prendevilles, as "canaille." But she quickly rationalizes her family and class position: "'We've got the right of competence!'" (79-80). Similarly, when Peggy tries to distance herself from Kit after having broken their engagement,

she raises her family's conflicting views of Kit. She thinks first of her grandfather's admiration for the Prende-villes' "archness" (268): "But Peggy had other blood, beside that of Old John in her. She was not sure that archness was as desirable a quality as her grandfather considered it. Wasn't it what granddad called 'archness' that had brought about all this misery?" (268). Peggy also lives on the borderland and possesses the Anglo-Irish ability or misfortune to perceive the world from at least three viewpoints: that of the Irish, that of the English, and a combination of both. As well as having different blood from her grand-father, Peggy has also been educated differently, and she has traveled out of Ireland, a fact which may also account for her ability to see the world and Kit from different viewpoints. Although Peggy is of peasant stock and has a Catholic grandmother, her education seems to have enabled her to "inherit" an Anglo-Irish world view.

Apart from the representation of the Englishman, Sir Harold Burgrave, the issue of nationality is not foregrounded in this novel, but it is raised in the representation of Peggy, particularly as she interacts with Burgrave. Shibby's definition of Peggy's "Englishness" is racial: "'[A] good big handsome healthy girl, and sensible; that was the English drop she got from her mother" (193). Peggy's own view is the same: when the Englishman, Burgrave, includes Peggy among the

Irish he denigrates, she quickly retorts, "'I'm half English! . . . My mother's English,'" Nevertheless, Burgrave provides another definition of nationality, one that is not defined racially but legally: "'Women have no nationality, only what they get from men! If you want to be English you'll have to marry an Englishman'" (186). Like the illegitimate Shibby, Peggy's identity can only be validated through her legal relationship with the male gender. Despite her English blood, however, Peggy is represented as having the "inveterate Irish need to make herself agreeable" (107) and as wearing "green linen" (165). The issue of Peggy's nationality is raised not simply because her mother is English but because she is often represented in relation to the other, to the Englishman, Burgrave, by whom she will eventually be colonized.

Peggy Weldon's education, and hence her class, a construct that is represented by her eligibility in marriage, differs greatly from Kit's. Her education is contrasted not only to Kit's but also to his sister's, Nessie, so that the difference in education is clearly shown to be the consequence of economics and not the consequence of class or gender as it was in previous novels (since the novel begins by assuming that the Prendevilles are, of course, socially far superior to the Weldons). Neither Peggy nor Nessie attended National School; Peggy was educated at home, Nessie

was tutored by a monitress from the National School: "then Mrs. Johnny Weldon had compassionately intervened, and Nessie had shared with 'the Grabber's daughter' the teaching that Peggy received from her mother, preliminary to being sent to schools, English and French, of a class to which the daughter of 'the Grabber's' employer could not aspire" (55). The obvious use of the word "class" highlights even more clearly the difference in status between the two girls and the two families. It highlights also the irony that the "Grabber's daughter" now has the ability to receive an education far superior to that of her "employer's" daughter. Consequently, Peggy, the "Grabber's daughter," is inscribed with the markings of another class. Of peasant origin, of middle-class parents, Peggy is now eligible to marry into the English aristocracy. Not surprisingly, Peggy's education has not been purchased for its intrinsic value alone; rather it has been bought in order "to keep the child free from undesirable village relatives and companions, and an Irish accent" (77). Similarly, Peggy's speech also distinguishes her from Kit Prendeville who has "a brogue" (235).

Peggy's education seems to have done more than teach her to speak French, play the piano, and lose her accent. Peggy is self-confident and rebellious and, as far her gender and the manipulation of her parents allow, she strives to act and think independently, and she achieves a measure of success.

Significantly, she is unlike Kit in that she is able to reflect upon and analyze her situation. When Kit is about to propose to her, he also recognizes the consequences of her different education, and, for the first time, he begins to doubt his innate superiority as a male Prendeville:

He suddenly felt that he was nervous and not sure of his ground. He tried to hearten himself with the remembrance that she was 'only Johnny Weldon's daughter,' but all the unnerving thoughts that he believed he had long since set aside, of how she had been 'at swell schools,' and could speak French, and play the piano, and had seen the world--or more of it than he had--and was . . . stunning to look at. All these advantages, crowded inopportunely into his mind, inducing a very unusual self-distrust. (210)

How far Peggy is able to think independently, however, and to resist her parents' influence and manipulation in her choice of husbands is uncertain. In a rare display of unity, Peggy's father and grandfather agree that "in spite of the disaster of her sex, Peggy was an undoubted credit to the family" (72). Consequently, they envision her as marrying into "the Landed Gentry of Ireland" (72), marrying "'a title'" (72). No real conflict ensues between Peggy and her parents although she clearly recognizes that in their courting of Burgrave, she is to be "'human sacrifice'" (185). In the end, the Weldons' ambition is advanced by Maggie who comes to tell Peggy of her affair with Kit, a fact denied by Kit in writing. Peggy is now faced with the difficulty of identifying the truth. Maggie and Young John Weldon are



allied against Kit. Mrs. Weldon, of course, supports the paternal authority that says, "'he knows more than we do'" (247), an authority which Peggy questions, "'Why should Father know more than we do'" (247); in fact, Peggy gives equal authority to all three versions: "'I see no reason why Kit's word shouldn't be taken as soon as Maggie Connor's--or as Father's either!'" (247). In Peggy's view the truth of the wastrel, the madwoman, and the lawyer/father are all, temporarily, equal, or, from another perspective, the differences amongst the classes and races these three represent are momentarily equalled and thus erased, only the reader knowing that Kit alone is lying. In an ironic turn of fate, Peggy decides to marry Burgrave when she is accidentally misinformed by Connor that Kit has eloped with Maggie. The old Anglo-Irish upper-class, faced with an alliance between the lower- and middle-classes, is now clearly powerless against the English "intruder." The possession and colonization of Peggy, the demesne, and the House is finally represented as the consequence of money, since Burgrave, like Peggy, has purchased his status in society. In the end, the issue of race and "racial uniformity" becomes irrelevant and is finally deconstructed.

### Images of Colonialism

As in all the writing of Somerville and Ross, the English character is always represented as the "stranger" (161), who has no understanding of Ireland or the Irish, and who thus degenerates into an object of derision. As we have already seen, Burgrave's presence raises the question of nationality, but he also contributes significantly to the representation of race, and, moreover, to the representation of race in a colonial context. Like the Prendevilles, Burgrave is Johnny Weldon's employer. A substantial figure physically, he is quiet and perhaps shy. Burgrave's father was an industrialist who owned "ironworks" in Scotland, so there are several references to his wealth and his "idle" bank balance (174) which have enabled him to buy a title (like Ducarrig, Burgrave is no "genuine" aristocrat). He is described as Weldon's "master" (104) and "liege-lord" (186). England's nefarious laissez-faire policy in Ireland during the famine is also alluded to as Burgrave's yacht anchors at the local pier, the same pier "on which, so many years back, the American famine ship had deposited her famine cargo" (155). The Englishman wields the power of money, the very power that Kit lacks.

Burgrave is also represented as fond of his food, so there are several scenes of him at table, and both Peggy and

her father comment on his appetite and manners. Weldon remarks to his English wife, "'I don't know if that's the way in your high English circles--only opening the mouth to put food in it--! You'd say he was despising us all!'" (107). Weldon notices his contempt for the Irish; Peggy notices his rapaciousness: "This big, devouring young man, with his loud, confident voice, and his large appetite, who looked at her as if he wanted to eat her up too, and took her father's homage, and everything else as his right--did he mean to take her too?" (185). What emerges from this description of Burgrave is not simply the representation of an individual Englishman but the representation of the all-consuming colonizer. When Peggy uses the words "take" and "right," she links the Englishman to the Prendeilles, the former colonizers whose motto, we noted earlier, is "Je prends." Although Peggy and her father recognize Burgrave's identity as a colonialist, their own Protestant identity notwithstanding, they are, nevertheless, colonized by him.

Burgrave views Ireland as a foreign place. Inver is a "'God-forsaken place'" (171). He has difficulty understanding the Irish whom he refers to pejoratively as "'Paddies,'" and whom he stereotypes as having "'the gift of the gab'" (264) or as being "'all thieves'" (264).<sup>15</sup> He refers to Kit as "'That cub!'" (168) and dismisses Jimmy Connor as "'mad or drunk, or both!'" (295). Burgrave's attitude to women

mirrors his colonizer's attitude to the Irish. When he meets Peggy at her first race meet, he is described as preferring "young women who were ignorant of matters in which he could instruct them" (114), presumably because he can dominate them, and, again, in reference to Peggy, we are told that he is "a young man with a very special passion for informing the ignorant" (126). He flirts with her not because he is attracted to her, but simply "for a lark".

His encounter with Old John Weldon, however, does provide some humor and represents Burgrave as a bumbling idiot though not a necessarily harmless one. Arriving by himself at the Weldons' lodge on "an outside car of primitive type" (156), Burgrave calls Old John, whom he believes to be an old tenant, to open the gates.

Old John received this command in silence. He looked slowly at the visitor, and then at the lad who was driving. In his mind was a contest between the inveterate politeness of his generation and class; and displeasure at its absence in strangers. Displeasure carried the position, even though he had quickly guessed who it was that had so crudely demanded his services. (157)

Once again a contradiction is apparent in Old John's attitude, the result of his rapidly changing position in society and his consequent confusion of identities, a construction now familiar in the writing of Somerville and Ross. As Fehlmann notes, Old John "symbolisait les premiers pas hésitants d'une nouvelle bourgeoisie sur la voie de sa puissance" (342), but Old John is perceived by Burgrave as

the poor tenant he once was and not as the present owner of the demesne of Inver. Torn between his past and present identity, Old John, who is described by Burgrave as "'a fat old fool'" (158), hesitates to act and, in the confusion that follows, is accidentally knocked to the ground. Appearing an object of ridicule to Peggy, Burgrave awkwardly adjusts his yachting clothes (signifiers of Britain's naval and imperial power) and "curses Ireland and all things Irish" (158). The English foreigner has been fooled by a situation he does not understand.

Burgrave frequently characterizes England as a colonial power and directly compares Ireland with other British colonies. Burgrave recognizes Captain Jas as a fellow member of the empire, despite his disheveled appearance. He questions the difference between Jas and his son Kit, who looks and sounds like a "native": "He thought: 'The old chap's a Sahib! How on earth did he come to be the father of that cub?'" (178). In another instance, he states that Irish hotels are "'not fit for white men!'" (168), obviously implying that the English are white and the Irish are not. At the races, which the narrator carefully describes in ethnographic detail, Burgrave is reminded of the West Indies:<sup>14</sup>

Clytagh was the central point of a remote and primitive district; Burgrave, strolling back with Peggy towards the Judge's stand, boring ways through the congested

throng of jovial friendly people, found himself remembering a recent visit to the West Indies, and the fashions that had prevailed at a Plantation Party. The costumes here, as there, recognised no law of fashion except those dictated by the taste of their wearers; the hats of the younger ladies had, equally, the charm of individual fancy, and glowed with a variety of colours that suggested a rainbow in high fever. Burgrave looked at Peggy, with approval. "She's dressed like a white woman, anyway!" he thought,--'jolly well-turned out, good-looking girl!" (122-23)

In this last example, it is perfectly clear that Burgrave's image of Ireland and the Irish mirrors his image of other British colonies and their people.

Burgrave, however, does not only view Ireland as a colony, he becomes the "devouring" colonizer. He first comes to Ireland to collect his rent, to fish, and to sail, but he returns with specific objectives. He desires a Big House and a wife, and, like all good colonialists, he returns bearing gifts for the "natives," for the Weldons and their servants (263). When Johnny Weldon first mentions the Big House of Inver to Burgrave, he casually expresses some interest as "'it just happens that architecture is rather a hobby of mine'" (169). What represents history for Old John, a passion for Shibby, and freedom for Kit, is for Burgrave merely a diversion. When he visits the House, Weldon watches him "estimating its every measurement, with the ardent pedantry of an amateur" (174), but his diversion soon develops into something far more serious, and Weldon's

representation of Burgrave contradicts the former image of an amateur indulging his hobby:

Young Johnny agreed humbly, and with awe. He had believed himself to be a practical person, and a man of business, but here was this rich young Bar'net, this proprietor of Heaven knows what places in his native land, excelling in methodical competence any professional house-agent whom he had ever met. (175)

Burgrave has revealed himself not as an amateur, not as a lover of architecture, but as a remorseless businessman assessing his future possessions. Not satisfied with the House alone, he also desires Peggy and the demesne: "He felt that he had never wanted anything in his life more than this house--it and Peggy and the demesne--they all seemed to go together--if he lost one, he lost all!" (265). When he buys the House, his thoughts turn immediately to them, and the narrator cannot avoid stressing somewhat ironically: "In justice to him it should be noted that in the order of his thoughts, Peggy came first, by quite a very long way" (272). Once again, however, the reader alone must decide for herself how long. Nevertheless, the colonialist is not allowed complete success. Burgrave takes Peggy back to England to marry her, but he never possesses or inhabits the House.

### **Conclusion**

The final image in the novel is that of Shibby and "her enemy" (312), Johnny Weldon, dragging Jas's body from the ruins of the House. Johnny may gloat that he is insured, but

the younger generation has gone: Maggie is dead, Peggy is in England, and Kit has lost his land, his House, and his past; only "ghosts from the past" (Kiberd 393) remain. Dead bodies litter the endings of these Somerville and Ross novels: Francie Fitzpatrick, Dr. Mangan, Dan Palliser, Jas Prendeville: each one typifies in some way the representation of their class position at that historical moment as well as the fate of a particular fictionalized character. Certainly Jas represents the end of the Anglo-Irish as a people with a separate identity and a separate history. Nevertheless, although The Big House of Inver is a dark work of the imagination, its ending is not as hopeless as that of An Enthusiast written before the Civil War. Although the novel finally admits a theme, begun in Mount Music, that the Anglo-Irish have become extinct, an Irish identity, however, emerges without their leadership in the capable hands of Johnny Weldon. Ireland will not fall into the hands of the Coynes, or the Ducarrigs, or the colonial Burgraves. The political allegory of Shibby Pindy and Johnny Weldon coming together to pull the remains of old Jas from the smoking ruins is too obvious to be missed. The middle-class--admittedly Protestant, but of mixed race (Molly Casey is Johnny's mother)--is eventually allowed to succeed. Perhaps they are allowed to replace the Anglo-Irish in a position of prominence because, in its examination of race and its



realization that class is not a inherent characteristic, the novel finally recognizes the dehumanizing effects of one group's total dominance over another--Britain's colonial relationship with Ireland. Somerville, it seems, has finally been able to translate her experiences and accept the new Ireland in her last important work of fiction.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Robinson 192-94 and Collis 225-26.

<sup>2</sup> Somerville was not a unionist; she was a Home Ruler with nationalist sympathies, but she certainly recognized the demise of the Anglo-Irish as we have seen from the study of the two previous novels.

<sup>3</sup> I have argued throughout that the writers' attitudes change in response to their environment and to the political situation.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson (186) also notices a difference from the other novels.

<sup>5</sup> John Cronin means mixed marriages in terms of religion; however, in the Irish context, we can also interpret religion in racial terms.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore Allen in The Invention of the White Race notes that during the time of the Penal Laws "the male privileges of the Protestant landlord had precedent over those of the tenant with respect to the women members of the tenant's family. More than one landlord boasted to Arthur Young that 'Many of their cotters would think themselves honoured by having their wives and daughters sent for to the bed of their masters.'" Furthermore Allen adds that "incredible as it is, Sigerson assures us that even in the early nineteenth century there were cases in which this ultimate form of negation of the Catholic Irish family was stipulated in the lease as a privilege of the landlord" (87). This is indeed what Somerville is indicating in the "Droit de Seigneur." This is yet another example of her feminism drawing attention to the injustice that occurs between the races and particularly as it effects women.

<sup>1</sup> See Theodore Allen, chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> There is no suggestion whatsoever in the novel that the Big House of Inver has been destroyed by republicans as were so many houses during and after the civil war.

<sup>3</sup> Shibby, like Charlotte, is not a New Woman, because, although she has the opportunity to marry, her rejection of marriage is not a free decision since it is governed by her illegitimacy, a social disgrace she refuses to transfer to another human being. Moreover, Shibby is a peasant woman and the New Woman was usually middle-class.

<sup>4</sup> This is a reference to Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie), the Jacobite Pretender to the English throne. Charles Stuart, however, was Catholic. Kit is Protestant.

<sup>5</sup> Somerville uses this term here to mean marriage within an extended family. Once again, her observations are supported by Arensberg and Kimball who state that "an isolated area of small population can soon become inextricably intertangled. Hence in the poorest and most isolated regions we find the greatest amount of intermarriage" (91).

<sup>6</sup> In An Enthusiast and in Mount Music, the Protestant, Anglo-Irish Parnell, founder of the Land League, is evoked as an Irish patriot.

<sup>7</sup> In this passage Kiberd has a note referring to Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston, 1967) 95-100.

<sup>8</sup> Although I am reading Shibby's obsession with "blood" theoretically as ethnocentric, there is also a realistic basis for this character trait. Once again Arensberg and Kimball can provide an explanation. Discussing "Familism and Sex" they write:

Everything one does or is can be referred to one's "blood." Heredity is the explanation of success or failure, high position or low estate. Since one's heredity includes the occupational and other status of one's forbears and the whole gamut of relations which marked their place in the community, a continuity is preserved between the present and the past which defines one fully as a member of one's group. (217)

Clearly in this passage, the authors also seem to be equating heredity (or race) with occupation (class).

<sup>13</sup> Paddy is the diminutive for Patrick. Although the term was first occasionally used in the eighteenth century, the English used Paddy widely during the nineteenth century to stereotype the Irishman. Curtis writes that gradually Paddy became transformed as "a rather primitive, rustic, or simple-minded peasant to a degenerate man and then an apelike monster" (Angels and Apes xiii).

<sup>14</sup> This is not the only time that Burgrave draws a parallel between Ireland and the West Indies. It is interesting to note that Allen states that the British policy in Ireland of drawing the "Irish Catholic bourgeoisie into the intermediate social control stratum" to end racial oppression is paralleled in the West Indies. "In both cases the colonial ruling power, faced with a combination of insurrectionary pressures and external threats, over a period to time (much the same period of time, indeed) resolved the situation by the decision to recruit elements of the oppressed group--Catholics in one case and persons of African descent in the other--into the intermediate buffer social control stratum" (112-13).

## CONCLUSION

As is evident from the study of these four novels, which form a significant portion of the canon of Somerville and Ross, representations of class, race, religion, and gender are not static. Rather they change and develop as Somerville (after the death of Ross) responds to the changing political situation in Ireland. As the Irish struggled to define themselves during this period, 1894-1925, particularly in relation to the English, in an emerging post-colonial situation, the Anglo-Irish who remained in Ireland attempted also to redefine themselves as Irish, rather than Anglo-Irish. At the same time, those who had not fully embraced the nationalist struggle still desired to retain a separate identity and still resisted the hegemony of the new state as elements in the new state also sought to exclude them. Thus Somerville and Ross attempt to define themselves individually and collectively in relation to the various political, racial, and religious groups in Ireland during this period, groups that are also their audience. They also attempt to define their situation as women who resist the patriarchy, the emphasis on gender also changing in response to national concerns. Their attempt to define themselves anew and the consequent changes in the representations of their society have been the focus of this dissertation, a study which has

not been attempted before in spite of the renewed interest in Somerville and Ross over the last decade.

This reading of Somerville and Ross views the writers as capable of greater objectivity in their representations of themselves and others than previous readers have allowed. This view derives partly from my reading of An Enthusiast, a novel that has been largely ignored by the critics. Additionally, I recognize in the sympathetic representation of the middle-class Charlotte Mullen a woman who reflects the real dilemma of the writers' own situations as unmarried women in late-nineteenth-century Ireland.<sup>1</sup> My reading of Charlotte influenced by feminist theories of gender construction has led me to realize how Somerville and Ross represent gender as a social construction and how this representation fundamentally subverts the hegemony of the patriarchy.

Such a reading, therefore, has forced me to re-examine other social constructs in their novels. While Somerville and Ross tend to represent class and race as innate, indeed, almost moral categories in The Real Charlotte, Somerville gradually moves away from such representations. In The Big House of Inver class and race are deconstructed, albeit somewhat bitterly, as innate characteristics are shown to be largely determined by economic and social forces. Concurrent with the deconstruction of class and race is Somerville's

focus on nationality. Nationality intersects with class, race and gender in the three novels written by Somerville.

An examination of Somerville and Ross's representation of class as it comes into contact with race and gender between 1894 and 1925 reveals some interesting developments. In their representation of the Anglo-Irish gentry there is a clear evolution from a position of moral superiority in The Real Charlotte to one of moral depravity and degeneration in The Big House of Inver. We recall Francie's almost religious worship of Christopher Dysart and his heroic action in saving her from drowning. Larry Coppinger is also idealized by Barty Mangan, but he is idealized not for his position as a member of the gentry, but as a nationalist candidate and as an Irish patriot. Dan Palliser is no longer idealized by anyone. He is loved by Father Hugh, who recognizes his weaknesses and his humanity, and he is desired by Lady Ducarrig, but he is generally regarded on all sides as a turncoat. Both Larry and Dan represent the problematic moral and political situation of the Anglo-Irish and their inability to act or provide true leadership. By 1925, Captain Jas is represented as little more than senile, while his son, Kit Prendeville, is a wastrel, a cheat, a liar, a drunk, and a fighter, albeit a very handsome and charming one.

Of course, the moral decline of the Anglo-Irish is also paralleled by their representation as landlords. Central to

this representation is the question of the ownership of land which I have shown to be critical to all the novels except An Enthusiast. Here it is no longer relevant because the change in the ownership of land had effectively been completed. The only Anglo-Irish represented as landlords are the Dysarts in The Real Charlotte where the father is represented as a despot, the son as a reformer. Cracks are appearing in the establishment, but the landlord class is still firmly in control.

A marked contrast appears in Mount Music, written twenty-four years later, but set only a decade later than The Real Charlotte. In this novel, "the tenants are at the gates," as one critic puts it, but the landlord class is clearly to blame for their own downfall and exile. Here Somerville is concerned with the fate of those who are willing to change and who are determined to remain in Ireland. Thus the representation of the upper-class must include representations of race and nationality since these were important considerations in the formation of an Irish identity.

Yet another representational shift occurs in An Enthusiast (1921) where the upper-classes are no longer represented as a monolith although, strictly speaking, this has never been the case. In An Enthusiast, Somerville represents the fragmentation of the upper-classes faced with a rapidly

deteriorating political situation and the increasing hostility and differences between the unionist upper-classes of the north and those of the south. An even greater change is apparent in the next novel. Whereas Dan Palliser becomes a middle-class farmer, the Prendevilles in The Big House of Inver have almost declined into the position of their former tenants. Furthermore, their representation focuses on race rather than class as the novel questions the nature of colonial rule.

The representation of the Anglo-Irish has gone full circle. The descendants of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy are represented as lower-class. Class is no longer represented as an innate characteristic but as a moveable position in society. The feudal world of the Anglo-Irish has been replaced by bourgeois capitalism, which privileges economic power, is class-based, and ignores the dominance of race, tribe, or family.

Clearly there are also changes in the representation of gender which is never presented in isolation. The novels confirm Judith Butler's argument that

gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and . . . intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (3)



Among the upper-classes, the men are consistently represented as "weak tyrants." Married women are generally represented as exchangeable commodities, and both men and women are coerced into arranged marriages. Generally, married women are represented as voiceless and powerless except in the education of their daughters. Single women fare better and are usually represented as intelligent and independent. These are the characters who possess the detached and ironically humorous world view so often associated with the writers. Although this representation is fairly consistent, there are some changes in the representation of the daughters of the gentry. Pamela Dysart in The Real Charlotte is privileged in the sense that she has resisted her parents' marriage plans for her. This is not the case of the young Anglo-Irish women in either Mount Music or An Enthusiast. Here the upper-class daughters are completely dominated by their fathers while their mothers act as willing collaborators. However, the young women in Mount Music and Lady Ducarrig in An Enthusiast are sexually dominant as a result of their physical beauty. These two novels also largely abandon the discussion of women's place in Irish society. The focus is not gender identity but national identity which underlies both gender and class.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting representations of women are to be found among the middle- and lower-class

characters since they are more complex representations, particularly in their resistance to the hegemony of the patriarchy. Like their male counterparts, their representations also explore race and religion and raise questions regarding the term: "native Irish." Charlotte's gender identity and her resistance to the patriarchy is the focus of the early novel, but Francie Fitzpatrick, Tishy Mangan and Peggy Weldon offer interesting developments. For example, Tishy is more firmly entrenched in the middle-class than Charlotte, despite her Catholic and native Irish identity. Although she is a minor character, she is more powerful than Charlotte because she possesses two commodities that the Irish patriarchy demands of women: beauty and money. Consequently, she is privileged by the hegemony and is nearly allowed to enter into the Anglo-Irish world. But Tishy is an independent woman, who also undermines the patriarchy despite her father's authority. She finally supports the status quo, however, by refusing to undermine established class relationships. Peggy Weldon is also represented as an independent thinker who questions authority although her ambitions coincide with those of her parents. There is certainly a major development in the representation of Francie, Tishy, and Peggy. Tishy and Peggy (Catholic and Protestant) both possess a self-confidence and an autonomy that are both class- and gender-based and must surely derive from the

success of the women's suffrage movement and the increasing economic power of the middle classes.

The middle-class men are land agents, strong farmers, clerics, and entrepreneurs whose representation differs according to their race and religion, their moral integrity, their proximity to the peasant class as well as to the narrator's sympathy. The middle-class men also subvert or replace the economic power of the Anglo-Irish: Roddy Lambert embezzles the Dysart revenues; Dr. Mangan gains Mount Music, and the Weldons become the owners of the demesne of Inver. In all of these novels, the middle classes are the direct beneficiaries of the fall of the Anglo-Irish dynasty, regardless of race or religion. And there is Coyne, the nationalist turncoat. These middle-class representations cut across race and religion. Lambert is Protestant but penniless; Mangan is Catholic and wealthy; Old John Weldon is Protestant, wealthy, but of peasant origin, while his son is the offspring of a mixed marriage.

From the representation of the lower- and middle-classes in Somerville and Ross novels from 1894 to 1925, it is obvious that the middle classes begin to dominate. Thus it is important to remember, as Munck observes, that in 1923 "a republic was not in existence, and even the bourgeois revolution was incomplete" (60). The lower classes, nearly always Catholic and native Irish, are also presented

differently in these four novels although lower-class characters often possess important information necessary for the plot development. Like middle-class speakers, they provide humor through their rich dialect; they provide a realistic background; and, except for Charlotte's lazy kitchen maid, they are all Catholic. They comment on the actions of the main characters as do the Anglo-Irish in An Enthusiast. Representations of stage Irishry will always remain a contentious issue, but this study has clearly shown that although the authors may have been perceived as outsiders, comparison between their observations of native Irish life and those of more "objective" observers remain very close. Furthermore, I would argue that their authentic use of dialect has few rivals, and perhaps none in their use of dialect to delineate subtle changes of class and character.

Certainly their representations of Catholics does not remain constant; differences appear in the representation of Catholics in Mount Music, who are no longer identified as being only lower-class. These differences are continued in An Enthusiast where the lower-classes are no longer simply passive commentators. Although they are minor characters, they now animate the historical action of the novel whereas the main protagonist is paralyzed by indecision.

Finally, in The Big House of Inver, the focus has shifted almost entirely to lower-class and middle-class

representations. The Anglo-Irish upper class has become almost extinct, and those who remain are represented as having become like the stereotype of the native Irish. The main protagonist is an illegitimate, native Irish Catholic woman, a "primitive" with Anglo-Irish and Norman ancestors, a servant in her father's house. The "racially pure" lower-class characters are the main antagonists in the novel, and their words have the power to alter the course of events and directly affect the conclusion. Although their representation in this novel tends towards the stereotypical, they are also represented as victims of a colonial system.

While clear distinctions between class and race are obscured in The Big House of Inver, there is no gender reversal. Men control the world of business, but women of all classes are represented as strong and resilient. Thus Shibby Pindy rules tyrannically over her surrogate son so that he is unable to subvert the authority of either mother or father, and the Anglo-Irish are represented as the victims of a system they once administered.

As the novels develop within the context of contemporary Irish history, Somerville's representations of class, race and religion become less well-defined. Classes and races fragment, merge, and realign themselves to form a complex, modern capitalist state while the issue of women's suffrage gradually becomes subsumed as the Irish Free State

establishes itself. By 1922, women in Ireland had received the vote; and before "the deepening Catholic ethos of the state" (Owens 133) had emerged, it seemed that "as far as the political rights and constitutional status of women were concerned, the new Irish state of 1922 was all that might be desired" (131). Furthermore, the new state was no Workers' Republic and it was perhaps beginning to appear less alien than might have been feared.

Somerville seems to have come to accept the Irish Free State, but several decades would pass before Somerville and Ross would be accepted into the canon of Irish Literature. Certainly their texts were perceived as the texts of colonials by such writers as Daniel Corkery (Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, 1931), a perception that still persists. Yet, clearly, as this dissertation has shown, they were not outsiders. Their knowledge and understanding of the lives of the people amongst whom they lived provide valuable information about life in Ireland during that period. Even more important, perhaps, is their ability to analyze and portray the dynamic and rapidly changing social relationships between the different classes of society in rural Ireland. Their portrayal of Charlotte's tragedy as a critique of gender construction is perhaps without precedent.

Because of the their historical situation as Anglo-Irish writers living in what Julian Moynahan has described as A

Hypenated Culture, interpretation of their writing will always remain problematic. Andrew Carpenter has perhaps best described their position:

The worlds of Anglo-Irish writers spring often from a view of life that is constantly testing them one against the other . . . [which] comes at least in part from an enforced, continuous interrelationship between values, philosophies, languages and cultures apathetic if not downright hostile to one another. Differing views exist actively side by side everywhere, of course, but the passionate probing of their uneasy interaction is typical of much Anglo-Irish writing. (174)

Somerville and Ross were able to represent their society with some degree objectivity because they were involved in activities which led them outside their narrow class boundaries. They both traveled outside Ireland, so they were able to view Ireland and the different layers of Irish society as perceived by others, by foreigners, by the English. Furthermore, in their marginalized position as Anglo-Irish women, they were able to perceive the marginalization of others; and in their desire to be Irish yet retain their particular Anglo-Irish identity, they could accept the differences of other groups. Thus their novels are an attempt to confront and acknowledge differences, "to lift the veil" as Somerville wrote, to translate their experiences. As Seamus Deane states in his general introduction to the Field Day Anthology:

It is not necessarily true that something always gets lost in translation. It is necessarily true that translation is founded on the idea of loss and

recuperation. It might be understood as an action that takes place in the interval between these alternatives.  
(xxv)

Certainly, Somerville and Ross had also experienced loss; their novels are, in many instances, an attempt to comprehend and resist that loss. But in that act of translation they began recuperating a new identity while still resisting the dominant hegemonies.

Somerville certainly was willing to change and adapt--she was undoubtedly a survivor--but her writing clearly privileges those characters who defiantly resist their fate, women in particular. Somerville was determined to remain Irish, but she resisted assimilation into the new hegemony as she had resisted assimilation into the old hegemony of the imperial patriarchy. It is vital to remember her position as a minority albeit a privileged minority in a country where minorities--Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists remain economically and politically marginalized. The problem of integration and the loss of cultural and national identity raised in the writing of Somerville and Ross remains unsolved, both within the context of Northern Ireland and the Republic as well as within the larger context of the European Community of which Ireland is a member.



### Endnote

: In my reading I have also recognized the many parallels between their lives and those of other characters; parallels between Charlotte and Somerville are particularly interesting. I have not pursued this line of investigation in the dissertation, but it is an area which might provide some useful insights. Richard Tillinghast has also noticed close parallels.

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## VITA

Nicole Pepinster Greene was born in London of Belgian parents. Educated in a convent school with the daughters of Irish and Polish immigrants, she went to University College Dublin in 1966. After teaching in vocational schools, she emigrated to the United States, completed a Master of Arts degree, and taught in a community college.

Returning to Ireland in 1982, this time to Northern Ireland, Ms. Greene was employed by Rupert Stanley College and began teaching unemployed school leavers enrolled in training programs throughout the city in North, East, and West Belfast. She coordinated the Rupert Stanley Adult Education Program in West Belfast and established a new center on the Falls Road.

The Greenes moved to Louisiana in 1988, where Ms. Greene became an instructor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, teaching composition, British Literature, and Humanities. A few years later she was appointed as the Director of the Developmental English Program, the first non-tenured instructor to hold that position. Ms. Greene intends to develop the research she has begun in her doctoral program and continue in her present teaching position.

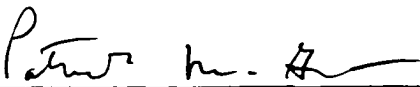
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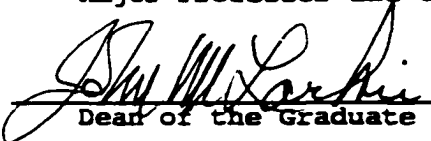
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**Major Field:** English

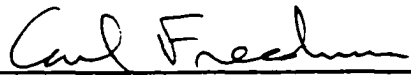
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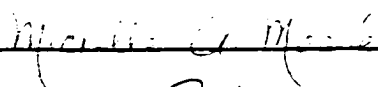
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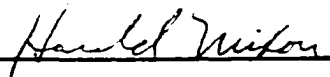
  
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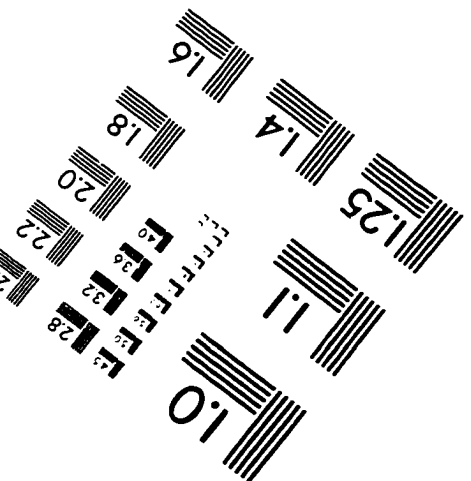
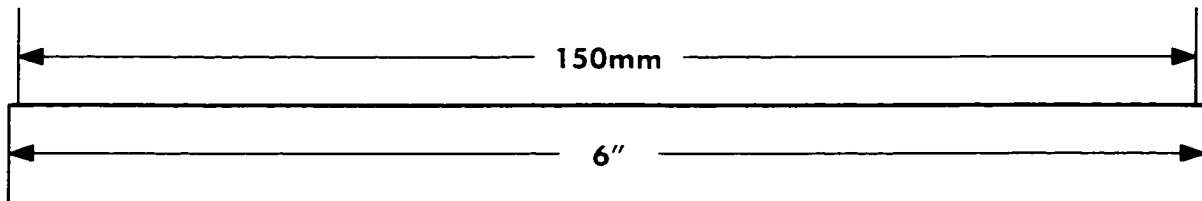
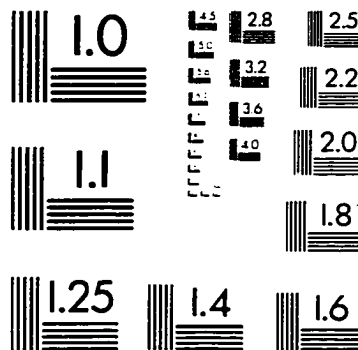
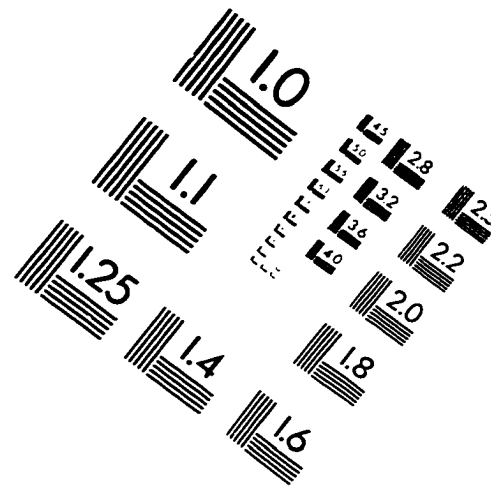
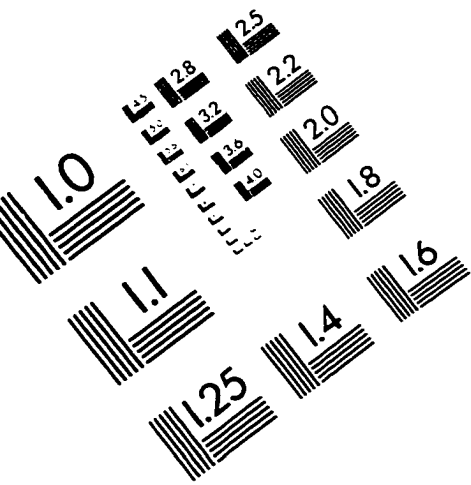
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